PENGUIN CLASSICS

E.T.A. HOFFMANN

Nutcracker and Mouse King

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

The Tale of the Nutcracker

Translated by JOACHIM NEUGROSCHEL

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NUTCRACKER AND MOUSE KING THE TALE OF THE NUTCRACKER

E. T. A. HOFFMANN was born in KÃ¶nigsberg on January 24, 1776, and baptized Ernst Theodor Wilhelm Hoffmann; he later substituted Amadeus for Wilhelm out of admiration for Mozart. Having studied law, he entered the Prussian civil service and held a number of legal posts in the eastern Prussian provinces. His earliest ambition was to be a composer or a graphic artist and painter, and it was not until he was in his thirties that he turned to fiction, becoming one of the best-known and most influential authors of his time. *PhantasiestÃ¼cke*, his earliest collection of tales, appeared in 1814. This was followed three years later by *NachtstÃ¼cke* and then in 1819â€“21 by *Die Serapions brÃ¼der*. Among his longer works is his second and final novel, *Die Lebensansichten des Katers Murr* (1820â€“22, *The Life and Opinions of the Tomcat Murr*), which represents the high point of his art. He exploited the grotesque and the bizarre in a manner unmatched by any other Romantic writer. Hoffmann died in Berlin on June 25, 1822.

ALEXANDRE DUMAS was born in 1802 to a Revolutionary army general who was the illegitimate son of a marquis. In 1839, after twenty successful years as a playwright, Dumas began to focus on historical novels. During his most productive period, from 1841 to 1850, he wrote forty-one novels, twenty-three plays, seven historical novels, and a dozen travel books. Though his books were well received throughout his lifetime, he died in comparative obscurity on December 5, 1870.

JOACHIM NEUGROSCHEL has translated numerous books from French, German, Italian, Russian, and Yiddish. He has won three PEN translation awards and the French-American translation prize. He has translated Thomas Mann, Herman Hesse, and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch. He has also compiled several anthologies including *Great Tales of Jewish Fantasy* and *the Occult, A Dybbuk and Other Tales of the Supernatural,* and *The Golem: A New Translation of the Classic Play and Selected Short Stories.*

JACK ZIPES is a professor of German at the University of Minnesota. A specialist in folklore, fairy tales, and childrenâ€™s literature, he has written several books of criticism and edited numerous anthologies. His Penguin publications include the anthology *Spells of Enchantment: The Wondrous Fairy Tales of Western Culture* and the Penguin Classics editions of *The Wonderful World of Oz* (an omnibus comprising *The Wizard of Oz, The Emerald City of Oz,* and *Glinda of Oz*) and *Pinocchio.*

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Introduction

The â€œMerryâ€ Dance of the Nutcracker: Discovering the World through Fairy Tales

How does a wooden nutcracker, decorated as an old-fashioned soldier, manage to conquer the world of ballet during Christmastime in America and many other countries every year? Who created this odd nutcracker? What is the real story behind this mysterious inanimate figure that comes alive to fight a wicked mouse?

In her illuminating book *â€œNutcrackerâ€ Nation*, Jennifer Fisher explains in great detail how an old world ballet from Russia became a modern Christmas ritual in the new world of America. Beginning with an account about the 1890 collaboration between Marius Petipa, a masterful choreographer, and Pyotr Ilich Tchaikovsky, the renowned Russian composer, she describes how Tchaikovsky unwillingly wrote the music to the choreography and libretto of Alexandre Dumasâ €™s â€œLâ€™histoire dâ€™un casse-noisetteâ€ (â€œThe Story of a Nutcracker,â€ 1845), which was an adaptation of E. T. A. Hoffmannâ€™s more famous tale, â€œDer Nu?knacker und der MausekÃ¶nigâ€ (â€œNutcracker and Mouse King,â€ 1816). Tchaikovsky was never satisfied with the libretto by Petipa and Ivan Alexandrovitch Vsevolojsky, who had used Dumasâ€™s sweetened version as his model, and he had major difficulties with Petipaâ€™s choreography, which lacked cohesion. While writing the music, he took a trip to America to conduct several concerts and his sister died, causing grief and stress. Petipa took ill just as the rehearsals began, and his assistant Lev Ivanov had to assume control of the ballet and made changes in the choreography. The premiere of the ballet at the St. Petersburg Imperial Theater in 1892 received mixed reviews, and though it continued to be performed in the early part of the twentieth century throughout Europe, *The Nutcracker* was not all that popular with audiences or with dancers. Nor had it ever been considered a favorite of children or families. The libretto, which was already an adulteration of the tales by Dumas and Hoffmann, was often shortened, altered, and choreographed anew by the different companies that performed the ballet so that the full ballet was rarely performed.

It was not until 1944, when Willam Christensen produced the first full-length production of *The Nutcracker* in San Francisco, that the ballet began to receive the attention it needed to become the classical ritual it is today. Christensen had been in touch with the brilliant Russian choreographer George Balanchine, who had advised him to stage the entire ballet in his original way; and Christensen, soon realizing its potential as a moneymaker and crowd pleaser for families, gradually began repeating it annually during the Christmas period. Balanchine followed suit in 1954 with his own unique spectacle in New York, and since that time not a winter season goes by when *The Nutcracker* is not performed throughout the United States and other countries in various formats. Not only has the ballet been adopted by Americans for their Christmas celebration as a ritual for middle-class audiences, especially young girls (as has Charles Dickensâ€™s *A Christmas Carol*), but it has also been adapted for animated and live-action films, and there

are numerous videocassettes and DVDs that offer recordings of live performances by famous European and American companies. All sorts of artifacts representing the wooden nutcracker have been manufactured, and the nutcracker has been transformed into a charming secular icon representing the joyful advent of the Yuletide season.

But this brief story does not reveal fully how the wooden nutcracker became so famous. There is much more to tell, for the nutcrackerâ€™s fame is not what its creator, E. T. A. Hoffmann, intended or what he might have expected from his unusual fairy tale.

A gifted musician and writer, Hoffmann certainly would have been pleased by Tchaikovskyâ€™s music, but he might have also been disappointed if not upset by the libretto and choreography. Hoffmann sought to revolutionize the fairy-tale genre and wanted his readers to envision the world in a different light from how they normally saw it. His fairy tale was a provocation and a radical attempt to change the genre for children. Most of all he wanted to express his dissatisfaction with the neatly trimmed bourgeois conventions of his time and the overly rational and disciplinary way in which children were being raised. Indeed, it is ironic that â€œNutcracker and Mouse Kingâ€ has now been fully appropriated in another culture as a conventional if not â€œexquisiteâ€ American ballet and ritual by the middle class, drained of its irony and satirical barbs. Through most of his life Hoffmann endeavored to break with the propriety and custom of a pretentious class society. Yet, he could never fully discard his social conditioning to become the free-spirited artist he desired to become. His personal â€œfailure,â€ however, led to his development as one of the most imaginative if not bizarre writers of his time, who desperately tried to transform life into art.

Hoffmann is the type of artist about whom biographers and critics have loved to build legendsâ€”or to explode legends by creating other legends. As early as 1827, Sir Walter Scott published a review of Julius Hitzigâ€™s biography of Hoffmann entitled â€œOn the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition,â€ in the *Quarterly Review*, in which he commented on Hoffmannâ€™s unusual stories: â€œIt is impossible to subject tales of this nature to criticism. They are not the visions of a poetical mind; they are scarcely even the seeming authenticity which the hallucinations of lunacy convey to the patient; they are the fevrish dreams of a light-headed patient, to which, though they may sometimes excite by their peculiarity, or surprise by their oddity, we never feel disposed to yield more than a momentary attention.â€ Scott condemns Hoffmann largely on the basis of reading Hitzigâ€™s biography without questioning his interpretation. Hitzig was, in fact, a good friend of Hoffmann, but he was also a prude and an overly serious civil servant who never fully understood Hoffmann. He criticized Hoffmannâ€™s life on traditional moral grounds and spurred Scott to conclude that, if Hoffmann had not led such a dissolute life, he might have written supernatural stories handled with delicacy, not macabre stories that appear incredible. Like Goethe, Scott believed that Hoffmann was sickâ€”mentally derangedâ€”and consequently he could not approve of the grotesque and absurd elements in his stories.

It is true that Hoffmann was sick during the latter part of his lifeâ€”physically sick due to atrophy of the liver that caused a slow paralysis of his body. Even here we have a legend. As late as 1966, Gabrielle Wittkop-MÃ©nardeau continued to spread a myth about the cause of Hoffmannâ€™s death and attributed it to his sex life and syphilis, a rumor that an Internet encyclopedia continues to spread in the twenty-first century. He is even labeled a notorious philanderer and impecunious alcoholic. But to argue that Hoffmann was mentally disturbed, sexually

promiscuous, and immoral is to overlook the fact that Hoffmann was a responsible civil servant and judge for a good part of his life, that he was an aspiring and diligent opera conductor in Bamberg, Leipzig, and Dresden, and that he was respected by some of the great minds of his timeâ€"doctors, judges, poets, actors, musicians, and administrators. Hoffmann was by no means a saint: he was overly fond of wine and may have had an affair after his marriage. But he was certainly not the demented eccentric that biographers try to make him out to be. He was a profound thinker, avant-garde in all that he attempted, and hence suspect in the eyes of the establishment, and especially in the eyes of the â€œphilistines.â€ This was a common term that Hoffmann and many others at that time used to describe those people who approached life with a utilitarian and rationalistic mentality, who followed life according to arbitrary precepts, and who had a narrow if not uninformed appreciation of the arts. In short, they were superficial and pretentious people who lacked any true appreciation of the imagination and the arts. Hoffmann detested the utilitarian nature of the philistines and mocked them in his tales whenever he could. His concepts of insanity, genius, music, hypnotism, dream, and reality formed a modern aesthetic theory, and he explored his unique ideas in other worlds that, he insisted, could be found in everyoneâ€™s imagination. The discovery of these worlds, so he thought, could open up new vistas that would enable people to gain a deeper pleasure of reality. Hoffmann was a man ahead of his time, an amoral man, an aesthete, but not a man without a sense of justice. As a matter of fact, his ideas of society and justice were so fine and idealistic that his experience with real society and justice as an expert in legal affairs and as judge and counselor â€œsickenedâ€ him and engendered the duality in his life that he recorded in his writingsâ€"Hoffmann longed to live his life primarily for art, and he could barely tolerate the banal conditions, morals, and ethics of the social and political order that he virtually served as a civil servant. He led a double life and created the *DoppelgÃ¤nger*, or double, so that he might resolve the split he corporeally experienced. Hoffmann dreamed of an earthly paradise, a utopia, a millennium, in which man as *Homo ludens* might create (free from repression) the kind of happiness we associate with beauty and the sublime. The man who risks his life for the sublime in an age of banalityâ€"this is how Hoffmann tried to realize his own life and art.

Let us try to counter some of the legends from the beginning: Hoffmann drank but he was not an alcoholic. He enjoyed wine and champagne and consumed alcohol in abundance, but we have no proof that he wrote under the influence. In fact, his stories and novels are so complicated that they demanded great concentration on his part and the full use of his conscious powers as a writer. Hoffmann easily became infatuated with young innocent women, but he rarely if ever had an extramarital affair. In his writings women represented the ideal priestess or goddess of the arts, and he idealized young women. As a talented writer, musician, and painter, he lived for the arts not for sex. Though he spoke his mind and loved to play pranks, Hoffmann was a true friend and never betrayed anyone or committed a crime. In fact, as judge, he came to the rescue of numerous people who were charged with crimes by corrupt politicians.

Hoffmann was born on January 24, 1776, in KÃ¶nigsberg (now Russian Kaliningrad), a city of some forty thousand inhabitants. His father, Christoph Ludwig Hoffmann, and mother, Luisa Albertine Doerffer, were cousins. His father was a lawyer, somewhat eccentric and imaginative and unreliable as a breadwinner. His mother was orderly and anxious and lacked confidence in herself. Before Hoffmann was born, his parents had two other sons. One died, and the second was

taken away by the father when he separated from his wife in 1779 and moved to another city. Thereafter, Hoffmannâ€™s father and brother disappeared completely from his life. Perhaps this is why friendship and the father figure, often portrayed as an omniscient adviser or devilâ€™s emissary, play such important roles in his writings. This may also be why Hoffmann had such a disdain for the orderly philistine life, which seemed to threaten his well-being and his artistic and imaginative pursuits.

After his fatherâ€™s separation from his mother, she returned to her family home run by her dominating widowed mother, two strange aunts, and an incompetent uncle. She virtually abandoned her son to her own motherâ€™s care and did not develop an affectionate relationship with Hoffmann. (Hoffmann made no mention of her or his father in his diaries or letters when they died during the 1790s.) The Doerffer household was a respectable middle-class family that had fallen on hard times, and Hoffmann was raised strictly with a view to making him into a lawyer or civil servant who might restore the standing of the family. As was the custom during this time, he was provided with music lessons and was expected to be well versed in all the arts. His modes of dress, speech, and behavior were governed by set social rules, which his pedantic uncle tried to enforce, and Hoffmann was constantly obliged to comply with social and familial precepts. At the same time, he was aware of the shortcomings of the odd household of domineering women and a foolish dogmatic uncle and found ways to subvert their plans to regulate his life. Very early Hoffmann came to resent and criticize the Doerffer family and sought an escape through music and writing. During his teenage years he formed a strong bond with a fellow student named Theodor Hippel and shared all his intimate dreams with him. Together they conceived numerous artistic projects and planned adventurous trips and other outings. However, their paths diverged by the time they began attending the university. Hippel, whose family was very wealthy and had been granted nobility in 1790, followed a straight and â€œnormalâ€□ path through the university to become a civil servant, administrator, and politician with a good deal of power. As the friends grew older, he often interceded on Hoffmannâ€™s behalf, lent him money, and tried to â€œstabilizeâ€□ his life by giving sound advice. But it was to no avail.

Hoffmann, who also studied law at the university, took a more zigzag course through life and realized that social class differences would keep him apart from Hippel. Moreover, Hoffmannâ€™s demeanor and dedication to art would cause rifts. He began writing novels and musical compositions as a young man and had his first love affair in 1794 with Cora (Dora) Hatt, a woman ten years older and married to a brewery owner. It was this turbulent and passionate affair that caused him to leave KÃ¶nigsberg in 1796. By this time Hoffmann, who had enrolled at the university at sixteen, had passed his first law examinations and was employed by the municipal government at Glogau in Silesia, where he benefited from the connections of another uncle, Johann Ludwig Doerffer. Hoffmann lived in his uncleâ€™s house, and apparently he decided that, to support himself and to pursue an artistic career at the same time, he had to prove himself as a jurist and civil servant and lead a respectable life. Part of his plan to settle down and forget Dora Hatt involved an engagement to his uncleâ€™s daughter Minna. It was clear from the beginning that he was not in love with her and was acting opportunistically to please her father and his own family in KÃ¶nigsberg. When his uncle Johann was promoted, the Doerffers moved from Glogau to Berlin in 1798; Hoffmann accompanied them and continued to work for the Prussian government. During the next two years he reveled in the cultural life of Berlin, attending the theater and

opera and visiting museums. In addition he began writing more and more musical compositions and endeavored to have some of his work published or performed, without much success. In the meantime he kept studying for his final law examination, for he knew that, once he passed it, he would receive a permanent position as a civil servant in the Prussian government and would become financially independent. By March 1800 he had passed the exams with honors and was assigned a post in Posen, a small provincial city in Poland, about two hundred miles east of Berlin, that had become part of Prussia. Hoffmann chose this opportunity to spread his wings. Within a short period of time, he not only broke his engagement to Minna but damaged his relations with the entire Doerffer family.

Hoffmann lived a convivial bachelorâ€™s life for a while, enjoying what little cultural life there was in Posen, and he soon married a beautiful Polish woman, Maria Thekla Michaelina Rohrer, whom he called Mischa. She came from a humble middle-class family and was not particularly well educated. But Hoffmann, despite his infatuations with other women, remained devoted to her for the rest of his life. Soon after this marriage, he became involved in a scandal during Carnival season by drawing comical sketches of some of the aristocratic Prussian officers; in consequence he was transferred to the tiny town of Plock (now called Plozk) in the Polish provinces. The only possibility for Hoffmann to survive in Plock was to throw himself into music by studying the great composers and writing his own compositions and essays about music. He even had his first article about music published, in a German magazine, and this publication gave him confidence to continue his study of music with greater dedication. For the most part, he felt himself bored and isolated and applied for jobs in other cities. Thanks to his friend Hippel, who had many important political connections by now, Hoffmann was able to obtain a governmental position in Warsaw, which was under Prussian control.

In 1804, Hoffmann and Mischa moved to Warsaw, where he soon became the center of the musical life in the city. Not only did he compose a singspiel called â€œThe Merry Musicians,â€□ but he also formed a music society and conducted and performed at various concerts. At the same time Mischa gave birth to their daughter, CÃ¤cilia. Hoffmann would have been content to have remained in Warsaw, but Prussia joined the allies in their battles against Napoleon, and the French troops invaded the city. Hoffmann lost his position and, to protect his family, he sent his wife and daughter to Posen to stay with Mischaâ€™s family while he tried to find some way to make a living in Warsaw. However, he failed and soon moved to Berlin, where he hoped Julius Hitzig, another Prussian civil servant, whom he had befriended in Warsaw, might help him. However, despite Hitzigâ€™s family connectionsâ€”he came from a very wealthy and established Berlin familyâ€”there was little Hitzig could do, and by the middle of August 1807, Hoffmann, who was very depressed, was further saddened to learn of the death of two-year-old CÃ¤cilia. At times starving and unemployed, Hoffmann shifted gears, abandoned the civil service, and tried to find a job as a music conductor, though he had very little experience. Fortunately, he was offered a position as director of the music theater in Bamberg, in southern Germany, and by the fall of 1808 he had moved there with Mischa.

No sooner did he make his debut in Bamberg than he lost his job. His lack of experience showed immediately. However, he and Mischa decided to stay in Bamberg, where he made his living by giving music lessons to the children of wealthy families and by writing compositions for the theater. He also started writing short stories, and his first tale, â€œThe Knight Gluckâ€□ (â€œRitter Gluckâ€□), was published in 1809. The following year the new director of the

Bamberg Theater hired him to work as his assistant, dramaturg, and composer. It appeared that conditions in Bamberg might now allow him to flourish as the versatile artist that he was. Indeed, Hoffmann helped stage some of the memorable plays by CalderÃ³n, Schiller, Lessing, and Shakespeare and operas by Mozart and Weber. He changed one of his middle names to Amadeus out of admiration for Mozartâ€™s accomplishments and began writing music reviews for various journals as well as short stories about a tormented musical genius by the name of Johannes Kreisler. Everything seemed to be going well for Hoffmann until, in 1811, he fell in love with one of his students, Julia Marc, a thirteen-year-old singer who had a voice like an angel. Hoffmann could not control himself, and though he never had an affair with her, his obsession eventually became public by 1812, causing a scandal in Bamberg. Since it became impossible for him to live and work there anymore, he had to search for a new position. It was during this time that he turned more and more to writing fantasy stories in the midst of composing his opera *Undine*, based on the fairy tale by his friend Friedrich de la Motte FouquÃ©.

In 1813, Hoffmann was fortunate to find a position as the conductor for an opera company stationed in Leipzig and Dresden. During the next sixteen months he conducted more than thirty-five operas and singspiels while finishing his own opera, *Undine*, and collaborating with FouquÃ©, who wrote the libretto for his opera. In addition, he published two volumes of short stories, *Fantasy Pieces PhantasiestÃ¼cke*, 1814) and wrote his most famous fairy tale, â€œThe Golden Potâ€□ (â€œDer goldene Topfâ€□). However, the stress caused by the war and disagreements at the opera took their toll, and Hoffmann was dismissed as conductor by the director of the company, Joseph Seconda. The loss of a secure income caused great difficulty for Hoffmann and Mischa. By chance, however, his friend Hippel appeared in Leipzig and encouraged him to resume his career in the civil service. Indeed, once again Hippel came to his rescue and procured a position for Hoffmann at the justice ministry in Berlin.

In September 1814, Hoffmann arrived in Berlin, and much to his surprise, he was greeted as a minor celebrity. His fantasy stories and fairy tales had been extremely well received by literary circles throughout Germany, and for the next eight years until his death in 1822, Hoffmannâ€™s stories were very much in demand by the publishers of ladiesâ€™ magazines, which had become very popular by that time. In addition to these publications, he wrote two intriguing novels, *The Devilâ€™s Elixirs* (*Die Elixiere des Teufels*, 1815â€“16) and *The Life and Opinions of the Tomcat Murr* (*Die Lebensansichten des Katers Murr*, 1819â€“21); published â€œNutcracker and Mouse Kingâ€□ and â€œThe Strange Childâ€□ (â€œDas fremde Kindâ€□) in two volumes of *Childrenâ€™s Fairy Tales Kinder-MÃ¤rchen*, 1816â€“17), which included stories by FouquÃ© and Carl Wilhelm Salice Contessa; and collected his fairy tales, novellas, and fantasy stories in two volumes with the title *Night Pieces* (*NachtstÃ¼cke*, 1815â€“17) and in four volumes with the title *The Serapion Brothers* (*Die SerapionsbrÃ¼der*, 1819â€“22).

No sooner did he settle down in Berlin than he began to hold weekly meetings at a nearby tavern with some of the leading writers and artists of the day; they would gather together, discuss cultural and political events, drink and eatâ€”and they would conceive projects together. Among the writers who would appear on a regular or irregular basis were FouquÃ©, Contessa, Adelbert von Chamisso, Ludwig Tieck, Clemens Brentano, and David Ferdinand Koreff, as well as the famous actor Ludwig Devrient and Hoffmannâ€™s friend Hitzig, who worked at the same ministry that he did. As time went on, the gatherings became less frequent, until Hoffmann called a formal meeting of many of the â€œmembersâ€□

of the group on November 14, 1818, the saintâ€™s day of the holy Serapion, to renew their association and discussions. The friends and writers of this group were depicted fictitiously in the framework of *The Serapion Brothers*, but there is no clear identification of one particular character with a real person. Actually it was Hoffmann who played all the roles in this framework collection, a multidimensional discourse about the imagination, fantasy works, music, and devotion to art. The manner in which he conceived this book basically shows how Hoffmann was inspired by his friends just as he was inspired by the plays, concerts, and operas he attended in Berlin. When his own opera, *Undine*, had finally been performed in 1816, he became even more famous and was constantly invited as an honored guest to attend literary salons and other cultural events.

But it would be wrong to focus on Hoffmann solely as an accomplished artist who became a gallant man-about-town. Hoffmann was a disciplined writer, constantly creating new types of tales and novels. His production and dedication to his writing damaged his health, and he was often sick. Moreover, there was always stress at the justice ministry. He began as a minor civil servant and was eventually promoted to the rank of councilor and judge. Along with promotions came merit increases in his salary because of his scrupulous work. However, his scruples also landed him in trouble. By 1818, Prussia, Russia, Austria, and England had formed the Holy Alliance, and there was a conservative and repressive political movement in all these countries that triggered protests by liberal groups, especially students. The leaders of the German principalities issued decrees that called for the punishment of anyone suspected of subversive activities. Because of Hoffmannâ €™s reputation as a fair and ethical judge, he was appointed to a special commission (the Prussian Intelligence Committee against High Treason) to investigate subversive activities (somewhat like the House Committee on Un-American Activities during the 1940s and 1950s). In many cases, Hoffmann brought about the release of people with liberal ideas who had been falsely charged with illegal activities. Hoffmann consistently defended the civil rights of the accused. The most important case involved the famous Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, founder of gymnastics, who had been in prison for eight months. Karl Albert von Kamptz, the notorious commissioner of police in the Department of Interior, who belonged to the Ministerial Commission, had Jahn sent to the fortress of Kolberg, announcing that Jahn had been proven guilty, something that was untrue. Hoffmann wanted Kamptz brought before the courts but was prevented from doing so by the King of Prussia himself. Hoffmann served on this committee for two years (1819â €“21), and in 1822 he satirized Kamptz as Knarrpaxiti in one of his last stories, â €œMaster Fleaâ€□ (â€œMeister Flohâ€□), and then boasted about it. Once Kamptz knew about this, he prevented the publication of the story in Frankfurt and pressed charges against Hoffmann, who by this time was dying from a liver disease. Hoffmann was ordered to attend the court proceedings, but he had become so ill he could not leave his bed. Once again his friend Hippel intervened, and Hoffmann was allowed to prepare a masterful defense of his case, and the king let him off with a reprimand. Soon after, â€œMaster Fleaâ€□ was published with certain portions omitted. It was Hoffmannâ€™s last laugh at the corrupt bureaucracy that he had so loyally served. By now he had atrophy of the liver and degeneration of the spinal marrow. He was in great pain, but kept writing until his throat became paralyzed. He died on June 25, 1822, at the age of forty-six, and was buried in Berlin. His wife, Mischa, left Berlin and went to Posen, where she stayed until 1835; though looked after by Hoffmannâ€™s loyal friend Hitzig, she died in poverty in the small city of Warmbrunn on January 27, 1859.

Hoffmann was a late bloomer as a writer, but once he discovered his extraordinary talent, he become almost obsessed by his writing and demanded total dedication of himself to his craft, something he often demanded of the protagonists in his stories, who often collapsed or died because they could not maintain their dedication or find a way to balance the dedication to art with the crass demands of their mundane existence. This was the major conflict in many of Hoffmannâ€™s stories, life in the paradise of art versus life in the humdrum world of the philistines. It was clearly expressed in his first major fairy tale, â€œThe Golden Pot,â€ which is subtitled â€œA Fairy Tale from the New Time,â€ a signal that Hoffmann was about to use the fairy tale in an unusual modern way to address readers with a new sensibility. To a certain degree, Hoffmann carried the Romantic experiments of Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder, Ludwig Tieck, and Novalis to its logical end with his intricate tales of magical realism. Not only is â€œThe Golden Potâ€ the culmination of the innovative fairy tales produced by the Romantic writers, it is also the pioneer work of European magic realism. Hoffmann developed an uncanny narrative style of reportage and often began his tales as though he were writing an article for a newspaper or preparing a dry historical chronicle. However, after a few paragraphs he conflates reality with fantasy, and the boundaries between the two collapse. Both reader and protagonist must find their way through a labyrinth of events, and in the course of the narrative, they must also learn to position themselves to see anew, to perceive their world anew, and to delight in their imaginations.

This is the ultimate message of â€œNutcracker and Mouse King,â€ but there is more to this story and its background than meets the eye. Hoffmann wrote this fairy tale in 1816 ostensibly for the children of Julius Hitzig, but in reality it was a tale *about* the Hitzig family and their social class and how children were being raised. Though Hoffmann himself led an eminently bourgeois life, he was personally unconventional and somewhat eccentric, while Hitzig was serious and proper and felt that there was something immoral about Hoffmannâ€™s lifestyle. In Hitzigâ€™s eyes, Hoffmann was somewhat weird. Nevertheless, they were good friends, and Hitzig attended Hoffmannâ€™s weekly Serapion meetings while Hoffmann was a welcome guest in the Hitzig house. By 1816, the Hitzigs had two children, Marie and Fritz, ages six and eight, and Hoffmann had great affection for them, although he was known never to caress the children or physically demonstrate his feelings. Rather, he showed his affection through gifts and stories. In 1815, he had given the Hitzig children an illuminated castle that he himself had built, and he told them the story of â€œUndineâ€ and other tales. Hoffmann was an energetic, small, wiry man with a twinkle in his eyes that often blitzed like lightning. He was not particularly handsome, but when he began speaking and played music, he could be captivating. There was magic about Hoffmann that drew all kinds of people to him, and there is no doubt that the figure of Drosselmeier in â€œNutcracker and Mouse Kingâ€ bears some of his characteristics, just as the children are related to a certain degree to Marie and Fritz Hitzig. But it would be misleading to interpret â€œNutcracker and Mouse Kingâ€ from a simple autobiographical perspective. After all, his tale was a radical fairy tale intended, like â€œThe Golden Pot,â€ to give a new form to fairy tales written for children, and indeed, Hoffman was preparing the way for many writers of modern fairy tales like Hans Christian Andersen, who owed Hoffmann a great debt.

Hoffmann was not all that conversant with childrenâ€™s literature at the beginning of the nineteenth century, but he knew from his own experience and from observing the children of proper and decent bourgeois families that their lives were overly regulated, and in keeping with the rationalism of the times, they were â€œdrilledâ€ to behave according to moral and ethical principles that were to curb their imaginations. Though Hoffmann himself had never been able to abandon these principles altogether and though he felt at home in, and needed the security of, a settled middle-class life, he had always felt confined by all the conventions and constantly sought alternatives to them in his tales, if not in his own life. He could be abrasive and also gentle in his ironical critique of the neat and homey bourgeois customs. But he never abandoned championing the imagination with all his critical powers.

In 1816, when he proposed to FouquÃ© and Contessa that they collaborate on a book of fairy tales for children, he knew that his own contribution would be a kind of manifesto about a new form of fairy tale. He had already announced his â€œradicalâ€ intentions in â€œThe Golden Pot,â€ a complex fairy tale for adults, and he wanted to do the same with â€œNutcracker and Mouse Kingâ€ and â€œThe Strange Childâ€ for children. This became much clearer when he reprinted â€œNutcracker and Mouse Kingâ€ and â€œThe Strange Childâ€ in *The Serapion Brothers* in 1819, framed by a discussion about the merits of the imagination and irony and about what makes an appropriate fairy tale for children. Hoffmann indicates that his fairy tales are for children with lively imaginations and also for adults. Indeed, both his tales incorporate what he called the guiding Serapion principle, which was to determine the value of all the stories told by the friends in *The Serapion Brothers*:

> Each one of us is to test whether he really has seen what he seeks to communicate before he dares to say it aloud. At the very least, each one of us is to seek as earnestly as possible to capture the exact image, which arises within him, with all its shapes, colors, lights, and shadows, and then, when he feels himself ignited by all of this, to transmit this portrayal to the outside world.

â€œNutcracker and Mouse Kingâ€ is all about igniting the imagination of Marie so that she can act and realize her inner dreams and desires in opposition to a conventional and prescriptive upbringing. It is not by chance that the household in which most of the action takes place is called Stahlbaum, or â€œSteel Tree.â€ The parents of Marie and Fritz are truly solid and made of steel, and they are somewhat anxious that Drosselmeier, even though a friend, might contaminate Marieâ€™s mettle with his toys and foolish stories. He might even break the â€œsteel encasementâ€ in which Marie is placed to learn about proper manners and good behavior.

The question that Hoffmann asks in this taleâ€”and also in â€œThe Strange Childâ€â€”is how to infiltrate a good and proper bourgeois home to free the childrenâ€™s imaginations so that they can recognize and fulfill their desires. In this regard, the title of Hoffmannâ€™s fairy tale is misleading. The story is not about the nutcracker and the mouse king; rather, it is about the curious child Marie and the ambivalent, somewhat threatening figure of Drosselmeier, the mysterious artist and teacher. Hoffmann positions Marie as the learner, who grasps that she must use her imagination to see the world as it really is. Drosselmeier provides the

spark for her imagination and tests her through his remarks and stories to see whether she will remain true to her inner desires and imagination before he will help her reconcile what she sees inside herself and around her. From the point of view of Marieâ€™s parents and her brother, Fritz, and sister, Luise, she is delirious and talks nonsense. But Drosselmeier sees Marie differently: he is struck by the way that she associates her visions and imaginings with the world around her and how she combines them to enrich her daily existence. Consequently, Drosselmeier does his best to assist her almost magically to uncover the potential of objects and symbols to become alive and to animate her modus vivendi.

At the same time that Hoffmann depicts Marie developing insights and a new mode of perceiving herself in the world, he also prompts readers to read differently and to change their attitudes toward the fairy tale. This transformation is not imposed but emanates from the mixture of narrative modes and genresâ€”from a labyrinthine narrative structure, doubling of characters, and an ironic omniscient narrator. Hoffmanâ€™s fairy tale does not begin with the traditional â€œonce upon a timeâ€ rather, the beginning is a dry realistic description of the somewhat customary preparations for a Christmas Eve celebration in the home of a typical German bourgeois family at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

> For the entire twenty-fourth of December, the children of Medical Officer Stahlbaum were not permitted to step inside the intermediary room, much less the magnificent showcase next door. Fritz and Marie sat huddled together in a corner of the back room. The deep evening dusk had set in, and the children felt quite eerie because, as was usual on this day, no light had been brought in. Fritz quite secretly whispered to his younger sister (she had just turned seven) that he had heard a rustling and murmuring and soft throbbing in the locked rooms since early that morning. Also, not so long ago (Fritz went on), a short, dark man with a large casket under his arm had stolen across the vestibule. However, said Fritz, he knew quite well that it was none other than Godfather Drosselmeier.

The narrator is formal, often tongue-in-cheek, toying with the readers because he will soon use his careful realistic mode to depict the inner world of Marie as though she were actually experiencing everything that she sees, whether it be in her mind or outside her.

The shifts in narration are challenging for readers of any age, but they are clearly aimed at bringing all readers to realize that there is no phenomenological difference between the life of the mind and physical reality. The significance of Drosselmeierâ€™s satirical fairy tale â€œThe Hard Nutâ€ is determined by the doubling effect that allows Marie to have a more profound understanding of things that her immediate family cannot see and to determine how to fulfill her dreams. Like â€œNutcracker and Mouse Kingâ€ itself, â€œThe Hard Nutâ€ is an antiâ€“fairy tale, that is, it is an antitraditional fairy tale or folk tale because it is unsettling, macabre, and provocative. The king and queen are fops; their daughter is spoiled. The mice, who substitute for witches, fairies, and ogres, are ridiculous creatures. The horror and threats of the mice are ludicrous. Hoffmann creates a parody of court life of his times. Food and the appetite are the most important matters for the king and queen, who can also arbitrarily execute anyone they desire if their subjects displease them. The narrator Drosselmeier enters the story as artistic inventor, whose life is endangered because he inadvertently causes the

princess to become ugly; and as one of the main protagonists of the story, he introduces the double of his real nephew, who is also to become the nutcracker. The fairy tale ends unhappily, because it can only be completed happily by Marie, both in her imagination when she saves Nutcracker, and later when she marries Drosselmeierâ€™s real nephew from Nuremberg.

The reconciliation of real and imaginative realms that Marie experiences and the emphasis placed on following oneâ€™s natural instincts are developed more didactically and theoretically in â€œThe Strange Child,â€□ which was published in the second volume of *Childrenâ€™s Fairy Tales* (1817). Hoffmann had read Jean-Jacques Rousseauâ€™s works as a young student and was strongly influenced by them, especially Rousseauâ€™s notions of a natural education that would enable children to flower. Hoffmann never forgot Rousseauâ€™s â€œlessons,â€□ and in â€œThe Strange Child,â€□ he depicted two children, Felix and Christlieb, living in the country with their parents, Count and Countess von Brakelheim. The setting is idyllic, and despite the fact the Brakelheims have very little money and live like common farmers in a dilapidated house, the family is content. However, this harmony is broken by the â€œdistinguishedâ€□ visit of a wealthy and pompous uncle, his wife, and his dainty, disciplined children, who can spout their memorized lessons like automatons. The uncle is distressed by the lack of academic knowledge and poor manners of carefree Felix and Christlieb and offers to send a private tutor so that they might live up to the aristocratic reputation of the family. After his departure, Felix and Christlieb take the artificial toys that their rich relatives have given them as gifts into the forest to play with, only to realize how useless and boring they are. The next day, they meet a â€œstrange child,â€□ somewhat like an alien creature, in the forest, who unveils the magic of nature to them so that they feel liberated and inspired by everything they encounter. The androgynous child has magical powers and refuses to reveal its sex. Felix and Christlieb tell their parents about their encounters with the strange child, and the parents, though concerned, are happy that the children are at one with nature. Yet when the private tutor, Master Tinte (â€œInkâ€□), sent by the rich uncle, arrives and begins to control their lives with his pedantry, they lose their contact with the strange child. Fortunately, as Master Tinte begins to take over the family and oppress the children, they flee into the forest, where they once again encounter the strange child, who reveals how they can banish the private tutor from their lives. Soon thereafter, however, their father becomes ill and tells his children that he, too, had met a strange child during his childhood and that they should endeavor to stay loyal to this child. The father dies. His wife and children are forced to leave their home in nature. But because Fritz and Christlieb keep the strange child alive in their hearts, they continue to see the marvelous things that the strange child brings to them from his realm.

This short summary does not do justice to Hoffmannâ€™s remarkable fairy tale, which prefigures the science fiction/fantasy film *E.T.* by some 150 years. Whereas the alien E.T., who comes from outer space to help young children learn to empathize with and tolerate strangers in their lives, eventually departs, Hoffmannâ€™s strange child enters the lives of Felix and Christlieb to remain there forever. Hoffmann insists on keeping the child in us alive until we die. Without the imagination we can be instrumentalized and exploited. By no means was Hoffmann a devout follower of Rousseauâ€™s precepts concerning the importance of raising children in nature without books. Through his fairy tales and fantasies, he sought to bring about a deeper understanding of the mysteries of the imagination and an appreciation of how our inner and outer natures cannot be

divided. These were deeply held convictions, and he embodied them in his own life so that it is at times difficult to distinguish where Hoffmannâ€™s life ends and his art begins. The ambivalent and enchanting figures of Drosselmeier, Marie, Felix, and Christlieb are good examples of how it is possible to discover the world through fairy tales and to blend all kinds of ontological phenomena to develop oneâ €™s identity.

The same cannot be said of Alexandre Dumasâ€™s Drosselmayer and Marie in â €œThe Tale of the Nutcracker,â€□ the 1845 French adaptation of Hoffmannâ€™s fairy tale. Dumas (1802â€“70), born in Villers-CotterÃ¤ts, a small town outside of Paris, desired to become a great writer ever since his youth. He moved to Paris in 1823, and within six years he had made a name for himself with his historical play *Henri III*; he went on to become the most famous playwright in France during the nineteenth century. He was also regarded as one of the finest novelists of his times, with such works as *The Three Musketeers* (1844), *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1846), and *The Man in the Iron Mask* (1848â€“50). Unlike Hoffmann, Dumas became prominent as a young man and was amazingly prolific, in part because he collaborated with many writers, who supplied him with drafts and sketches for his works. Nor did he worship art in the same manner as Hoffmann, who lived for his art. Dumas lived for his public and churned out plays, stories, dramas, novellas, and novels at a fast rate in newspapers, magazines, and in book form. He wrote to entertain, rarely to teach or to theorize. He popularized history and wanted the populace to read his works, which they did. Why and how he translated Hoffmannâ €™s â€œThe Tale of the Nutcrackerâ€□ is somewhat of a mystery. We do know, however, that he was familiar with Hoffmannâ€™s tales and admired him. He even wrote a tale, â€œLa femme au collier de veloursâ€□ (â€œThe Woman with the Velvet Necklace,â€□ 1851), which features Hoffmann, who falls in love with a dancer. But Dumas had no facility with the German language, and it is unclear whether he translated â€œNutcracker and Mouse Kingâ€□ or whether he had the tale translated for him to adapt.

The cultural significance of Dumasâ€™s adaptation is minimal. Though it is somewhat popular in the field of French childrenâ€™s literature, this popularity may have more to do with the popularity of Hoffmann and the Russian ballet. Not that Dumasâ€™s tale is poorly written, but it lacks the irony and complexity of Hoffmannâ€™s original. Dumas transformed â€œNutcracker and Mouse Kingâ€□ into a charming tale intended to entertain a group of rowdy children who tie up the author when he falls asleep in a boudoir. The comical frame allows the author to introduce Hoffmann as the real author of the tale and to begin addressing his captors in a didactic tone to enable his implied readers, young French children, to grasp a story that he sets in Nuremberg in the eighteenth century. Dumas includes several religious references that Hoffmann would not have welcomed; the name of the Stahlhaus family is changed to Silberhaus (â€œSilver Houseâ€□); and Godfather Drosselmayer is said to adore the Silberhaus children instead of maintaining an ambivalent attitude toward them. The sister Luise disappears from Dumasâ€™s story, and a governess by the name of Mademoiselle Trudchen (originally a doll) is added for comic effect. After introducing the main characters, Dumas more or less sticks to the same plot, but places less emphasis on the bizarre nature of Drosselmayer and the significant learning experience of Marie. Dumas appropriates the â€œGermanâ€□ tale Ã la franÃ§ais for young French readers and often has his author explain incidents where Hoffmann created enigmas. It is

strange that Dumas abandons the frame that he set at the beginning of his tale. It is almost as if he had forgotten it, for we never learn what happens to the author, who was telling the tale to liberate himself, whereas Hoffmanâ€™s narrator maintains his presence and manipulation to the very end. Dumas simply embellishes the proposal and marriage scene and closes the tale sweetly by writing:

> At this hour, Marie is still queen of the gorgeous kingdom, where we see brilliant Christmas Forests everywhere, rivers of orangeade, orgeat, and attar of roses, diaphanous palaces of sugar finer than snow and more transparent than ice. And finally, all kinds of magnificent and miraculous thingsâ€”provided your eyes are sharp enough to see them.

Hoffmannâ€™s version reads:

> Marie supposedly is still queen of a land where you can see sparkling Christmas Forests everywhere as well as translucent Marzipan Castlesâ €”in short, the most splendid and most wondrous things, if you only have the right eyes to see them with.

Both endings emphasize eyes and the perception of wonder, and clearly the question of vision is one that â€œhauntedâ€ Hoffmann during his entire life: how to envision and realize desire and not dampen curiosity as one matures within the confines of an orderly middle-class society. Freud recognized the significance of Hoffmannâ€™s reflections about vision and repression in his essay â€œThe Uncanny,â€ in which he analyzed Hoffmannâ€™s famous fantasy story â€œThe Sandman.â€ In that eerie tale the young protagonist, Nathaniel, is more or less driven to suicide because he cannot reconcile his imaginative projections with the rational approach to reality that his friends and family maintain. His eyesight is jarred, so to speak, and he becomes desperate and virtually loses his mind. Freud explains that Nathaniel had suffered from a traumatic wound in his childhood that he repressed, and because he never heals the wound, it returns to terrorize him. Insight into this dilemma, perhaps, might have saved him. It is difficult to say, but what Hoffmann keeps insisting in all his fairy tales and fantasies is that, if adults do not nourish the imagination in their children, the children will lose sight of their potential, and their imagination will take its revenge later by abandoning them in a banal, lifeless world. Life without the imagination in Hoffmannâ€™s tales can be traced in the mechanical behavior of those â€œdeadenedâ€ adults who want to regulate the lives of children, or in adults who have been traumatized because they cannot use their imaginations to gain appropriate recognition of their identities. Only by introducing disruptive and extraordinary characters like Drosselmeier, so Hoffmann believed, will children have a chance to glimpse the different worlds and alternatives to their lives that have already been chartered and prescribed before they were born.

Is this why his tale, transformed into a ballet, mediated by Dumas, Tchaikovskyâ€™s music, and the choreography of numerous artists, has become so mythic and captivating? Does the enchantment of the ballet have something to do with the liberation of our imaginations and our nostalgia for a time when we perceived everything around us and in us as alive? It is very difficult to talk about the meaning of *The Nutcracker* as ballet because Hoffmannâ€™s text has been â

€œdestabilizedâ€□ by Dumas and other adaptations, just as the original libretto by Vsevolojsky and Petipa has been changed and altered hundreds of times throughout the world. However, despite the diverse interpretations of the ballet, which often clash with one another, there is a basic plot to the movement of the ballet that recalls the Hoffmann tale.

Act I, Scene 1â€”The Christmas Party. The Silberhaus, or Stahlbaum, family prepares for a Christmas Eve party. The guests arrive. The two children, Clara and Franz, are excited. Uncle Drosselmayer, a peculiar gentleman who is Claraâ€™s godfather, appears almost magically and brings with him three mechanical dolls to display: a lovely ballerina, a dancing doll that blows kisses, and a marching soldier. Sometimes Clara is called Marie or Masha, and sometimes the mechanical dolls represent other figures. The guests are enchanted by his inventions. Franz receives a toy sword or a wooden horse, and Clara, a funny-looking nutcracker, which the jealous and raucous Franz breaks. However, either Drosselmayer or Drosselmayerâ€™s nephew manages to repair the nutcracker and place it beneath the Christmas tree in a bed. Afterward there is some dancing, and then the guests leave, while the children get ready for bed.

Act I, Scene 2â€”The Battle Scene. Clara cannot sleep because she is concerned about the nutcracker. She returns to the room in which the nutcracker has been placed beneath the Christmas tree, but strange things begin to happen. The grandfather clock turns into Uncle Drosselmayer, and mice come from all four corners of the room to attack the Nutcracker, who has come alive and assembles Franzâ€™s toy soldiers to assist him. The dreadful Mouse King leads the vicious mice. There is a fierce battle, and it appears that the mice will be victorious until Clara throws her slipper at the Mouse King, allowing the Nutcracker to take advantage of the rodent and kill him. Sometimes the Mouse King is simply knocked unconscious and is carried away by his troops. All at once the Nutcracker turns into a handsome prince.

Act IIâ€”The Land of Sweets. Now the Nutcracker Prince leads Clara to the Land of Sweets ruled by the Sugar Plum Fairy. Sometimes the bed is transformed into a sleigh, and they ride through a winter wonderland. Snowflakes dance. Once they arrive in the Land of Sweets, they are treated like royalty, and the Sugar Plum Fairy invites them to enjoy a lavish festival. The sweets, drinks, and flowers dance in their honor. They present a suite of dances from other landsâ€”China, Russia, Arabia. There may also be a large Mother Ginger with offspring or a Shepherdess with her lambs. Finally, the stunning Sugar Plum Fairy dances a pas de deux with her handsome cavalier. Thereafter, everyone dances in a grand celebration that appears to be a dream. Sometimes the ballet ends after this dance, and sometimes Clara awakens back home under the Christmas tree or in her own bed.

Depending on the choreographer and the production, Hoffmannâ€™s emphasis in his original taleâ€”keeping the imagination aliveâ€”is maintained through a diverting spectacle. But gone are the more serious issues of his artwork, such as the conflict between the philistine method of raising children that curbs the imagination and Hoffmannâ€™s innovative use of a double antiâ€“fairy tale that enables young

Marie to discover the miracles of life and realize her dreams. The ballet is more about the coziness of home, hominess, and the taming of the imagination. The episodes in the ballet take place in one night; the transitions are elegant and smooth. The ballet masks the difficult struggle that Marie (Clara) undergoes over a period of days in Hoffmannâ€™s tale, and it is not clear whether her miraculous adventure will change her life. There are only faint echoes of Hoffmann, the provocateur, in the music and behavior of the strange godfather Drosselmayer, whose role is more or less effaced in the ballet after the first act. Indeed, Hoffmannâ€™s tale is more or less destroyed after the battle scene. The second act is all fluff without much meaning except to show off the talents of the dancers. Marie is made into a mere spectator, just as children today are more and more expected to remain spectators and consumers of spectacles. Hoffmannâ€™s tale has been made into a candy-coated entertainment that wraps up the imagination instead of setting the imagination of audiences free to lead the lives of their dreams.

In Hoffmannâ€™s time there was a much different attitude toward children, family life, and the imagination; and fairy tales, in particular, were looked upon with suspicion because they might spark children to think in the â€œwrongâ€ way. Gradually, thanks to the Romantics like Hoffmann, imaginative stories for children have become acceptable for â€œgoodâ€ middle-class children. But fantasy works have also become domesticated in the western world, and *The Nutcracker* as ballet represents such domestication. Yet, as Freud has explained in his interpretation of the uncanny in Hoffmannâ€™s works, there is always a return of the repressed, and even as *The Nutcracker* merrily dances on, it carries within it the wound that it has caused to the power of the imagination in Hoffmannâ€™s tale, and who knows how viewers and participants will perceive and feel this wound? They might even be impelled to respond to the damage in their own fantastic ways.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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Nutcracker and Mouse King

The Tale of the Nutcracker

Nutcracker and Mouse King

A FAIRY TALE

E. T. A. HOFFMANN

Christmas Eve

For the entire twenty-fourth of December, the children of Medical Officer Stahlbaum were not permitted to step inside the intermediary room, much less the magnificent showcase next door. Fritz and Marie sat huddled together in a corner of the back room. The deep evening dusk had set in, and the children felt quite eerie because, as was usual on this day, no light had been brought in. Fritz quite secretly whispered to his younger sister (she had just turned seven) that he had heard a rustling and murmuring and soft throbbing in the locked rooms since early that morning. Also, not so long ago (Fritz went on), a short, dark man with a large casket under his arm had stolen across the vestibule. However, said Fritz, he knew quite well that it was none other than Godfather Drosselmeier.

Marie joyfully clapped her little hands and exclaimed: â€œAh, I wonder what lovely presents heâ€™s made for us!â€□

Supreme Court Justice Drosselmeier was anything but handsome. He was short and scrawny, his face was covered with wrinkles, and he wore a big, black patch instead of a right eye. He also had no hair on his head, which is why he sported a very lovely periwig made of spun glass and very artistic. Indeed, the godfather was altogether a very artistic man, who even knew a thing or two about clocks and could actually build them. So if any of the beautiful clocks in Stahlbaumâ€™s home fell ill and couldnâ€™t sing, Godfather Drosselmeier would come by, remove his glass periwig, take off his snug yellow vest, tie on a blue apron, and insert sharp instruments into the gears. It was very painful for little Marie, but it didnâ€™t harm the clock at all. In fact, the clock even grew lively, and it started cheerfully humming, striking, and singing again, much to everyoneâ€™s delight.

Whenever Drosselmeier visited them, he would bring something nice for the children. His pocket might contain a manikin that could twist its eyes and bowâ €”which was comical to see. Or Drosselmeier might have a box from which a little bird came hopping out, or he might have something utterly different. But for Christmas, Drosselmeier always completed a gorgeous artistic work, which cost him a great effort. That is why, after showing the gift, the parents very cautiously stored it away.

â€œAh, I wonder what lovely presents heâ€™s made for us,â€□ Marie exclaimed.

Fritz decided that this year it could be nothing but a fortress, where all kinds of very handsome soldiers drilled and marched to and fro. Next, other soldiers would have to storm and invade the fortress. But now the inside soldiers boldly shot their cannons, making them boom and burst.

â€œNo, no!â€□ Marie interrupted Fritz. â€œGodfather Drosselmeier told me about a beautiful park with a huge lake and with marvelous swans gliding about and wearing gold neckbands and singing the loveliest songs. Then a little girl comes to the lake and entices the swans and feeds them sweet marzipan.â€□

â€œSwans donâ€™t eat marzipan,â€□ Fritz broke in quite roughly, â€œand Godfather Drosselmeier canâ€™t make a whole park. Actually, we get little out of his toys. Theyâ€™re promptly taken away from us. So I much prefer what Mama and Papa give us. We can keep their presents nicely and do whatever we like with them.â€□

Now the children debated what their parents would bring them. Marie felt that FrÃ¤ulein Trutchen (her large doll) was changing deeply. For, clumsier than ever, she fell on the floor every moment. This didnâ€™t happen without a nasty grin, and there was no further thought of the cleanliness of her garments. Nor did a thorough scolding help. Also, Mama, we are told, smiled with such delight at Gretchenâ€™s small parasol. Fritz, by contrast, assured the others that his royal stable lacked a good sorrel, just as his troops fully lacked a cavalryâ€”Papa was well aware of that.

So the children knew that their parents had bought them all kinds of beautiful presents, which they now displayed. But the children were also certain that the dear Holy Christ shone upon them with the pious and friendly eyes of children. And they were equally convinced that, as if touched by fruitful hands, every Christmas gift would bring marvelous pleasure like no other.

The children, who kept whispering about the expected presents, were reminded of that pleasure by their older sister, Luise. And they added that it was now also the Holy Christ, who, through the hands of their dear parents, always gave them whatever real joy and pleasure He could bring them. Indeed, He knew that a lot better than did the children themselves, who didnâ€™t have to nurture all sorts of hopes and wishes. Rather, they had to wait, still and pious, for their Christmas presents.

Little Marie grew pensive, while Fritz murmured to himself: â€œIâ€™d love to have a sorrel and Hussars.â€□

By now it had grown completely dark. Fritz and Marie, thoroughly pressed together, did not dare say another word. It sounded as if rustling wings encircled them, and as if they could catch a very distant and very splendid music. A bright shine grazed the wall, and now the children knew that the Christ Child had flown away on radiant clouds, flown to other happy children.

At that moment, they heard a bright silvery chime: â€œKlingling, klingling!â€□

The doors burst open, and the radiance erupting into the large room was so deep that the children cried out: â€œAh! Ah!â€□ and they halted on the threshold, petrified.

But then Mama and Papa stepped in, took the children by the hand, and said: â€œCome on, come on, you dear children, and look what the Holy Christ has brought you.â€□

The Gifts

I turn to you, gentle reader or listenerâ€”Fritz, Theodor, Emstâ€”or whatever your name may be, and I picture you vividly at your last Christmas table, which is richly adorned with gorgeous, multicolored presents. You will then envisage how the children halted, in silence and with shining eyes. You will then envision how, after a while, Marie cried out with a deep sigh: â€œAh! How beautiful! Ah! How beautiful!â€□ And Fritz tried out his caprioles, which were very successful. But the

children had to have been devout and well behaved the entire year, for never had they had such splendid and such beautiful gifts as this time.

The huge fir tree in the center carried many gold and silver apples, and, like buds and blossoms, the sugared almonds and colorful bonbons and goodness knows what other tidbits emerged from all the branches. However, the loveliest and most praiseworthy feature of the wonder tree was the myriad of tiny lights that twinkled like tiny stars in its dark boughs. And the tree itself, shining in and out, warmly invited the children to pick its blooms and fruits. Around the tree, everything shone very grand and brightâ€"what gorgeous things there wereâ€"why, who could describe them all?

Marie saw the most delicate dolls, all kinds of small, clean implements, and, what was loveliest to view: a silk frock, daintily garnished with parti-colored ribbons, hung from a rack right in front of Marie, so she could observe the dress from all sides. And that is what she did, while exclaiming over and over: â€œOh, the darling little frock, oh, the lovely little frock! And Iâ€™ll be quite confident that Iâ€™ll be allowed to wear it!â€

Meanwhile, Fritz, trotting and galloping around the table three or four times, was testing the new sorrel, which he had indeed found on the table, fenced in. Climbing back down, Fritz thought that the sorrel was a wild beast. But it didnâ €™t matter, Fritz would certainly overcome it. And he mustered the new squadrons of Hussars, who were magnificently garbed in red and gold and carried silver weapons. The horses they were riding were so shiny white you might have almost believed that they were pure silver too.

The children, a bit calmer now, wanted to pounce on the picture books, which were lying open, so you could see all sorts of very lovely blossoms and gaudy people and delightful children playing. And they were all painted so naturally as if they could truly live and speak.

Yes, indeed. The children were about to pounce on these wonderful books when the doorbell rang again. Knowing that now Godfather Drosselmeier would offer his gifts, the children ran over to the table, which was standing alongside the wall. The screen that had hidden the table for such a long time was quickly removed. And what did the children witness?!

On a green lawn embellished with colorful flowers stood a fabulous castle with many plate-glass windows and golden turrets. A glockenspiel resounded, doors and windows opened, and you could see very tiny but dainty ladies and gentlemen in plumed hats and with long trains strolling through the chambers. The middle room had so many burning candles in silver chandeliers that it looked as if it were fully ablaze, and children in short vests and jerkins were dancing to the sound of the glockenspiel. A gentleman in an emerald cape often peered through the window, beckoned to the onlookers, and disappeared againâ€"just as Godfather Drosselmeier himself, but scarcely larger than Papaâ€™s thumb, at times stood below, at the castle gates, then stepped back inside.

With elbows propped on the table, Fritz had looked at the beautiful castle and the strolling and dancing figurines. Then he said: â€œGodfather Drosselmeier! Let me into your castle!â€

Drosselmeier indicated that this was out of the question. And he was right. For it was foolish of Fritz to wish to enter a castle that, together with its golden turrets, was not as tall as Fritz himself.

And Fritz understood.

After a timeâ€"when the ladies and gentlemen were strolling to and fro in the same fashion, the children were dancing, the emerald man was peering out the

same window, and Godfather Drosselmeier stationed himself at the gatesâ€”Fritz asked impatiently: â€œGodfather Drosselmeier, why donâ€™t you come out through the other door over there?!â€

â€œThat wonâ€™t do, dear little Fritz,â€ Drosselmeier replied.

â€œWell, then let him go,â€ Fritz went on. â€œLet the green man go strolling with the others. After all, he keeps peering out.â€

â€œThat wonâ€™t do either,â€ Drosselmeier again replied.

â€œThen tell the children to come down,â€ cried Fritz. â€œI want to investigate them more closely.â€

â€œOh, none of this will really do,â€ said Drosselmeier, annoyed. â€œThe mechanics are set up, and thatâ€™s how they must stay.â€

â€œReeaaaly?â€ Fritz drawled. â€œNone of this will do? Listen, Godfather Drosselmeier. If those small polished things in the castle can only keep repeating themselves, then theyâ€™re not worth much, and I donâ€™t especially have to call for them. I need to praise my Hussars. They have to maneuver forward, backwardâ€”whatever I wish, and theyâ€™re not locked in any house.â€

And with that, Fritz jumped out toward the Christmas table, and he had his squadron leap back and forth on his silver horses, trotting and wheeling and smashing and firing to his heartâ€™s content.

Marie had likewise stolen away so gently, for she too had soon gotten fed up with the dancing and meandering of the tiny dolls in the castle; though, well behaved and well brought up as she was, she didnâ€™t voice her annoyance as did Brother Fritz.

Drosselmeier spoke rather crossly to the parents: â€œSuch artistic work is not meant for senseless children. Iâ€™m simply going to pack up my castle!â€

However, the mother came over and had the godfather explain the inner construction and the very wonderful and very creative gear unit, which set teensy dolls moving. The counselor took everything apart and then put it together again. While laboring, he turned cheerful again, and he gave the children a few lovely tan men and women with golden hands, legs, and faces. They were made entirely out of the fanciest gingerbread and they were so sweet and pleasant as to greatly delight Fritz and Marie.

Sister Luise, as Mother wished, had put on the lovely frock that was one of her gifts, and she looked gorgeous. However, when she was likewise about to don her dress, Marie felt that she would rather see it on Luise for a bit. And her mother was glad to comply.

The ProtÃ©gÃ©

Actually, Marie didnâ€™t want to leave the Christmas table, for she had discovered something that no one else had as yet noticed. You see, the review of Fritzâ€™s Hussars, who had paraded closely past the tree, had revealed an excellent little man, who stood there, quiet and modest, as if calmly awaiting his turn. Granted, there was a lot to object to in his stature; for aside from the fact that his somewhat lengthy and powerful upper body didnâ€™t quite fit in with the tiny, skinny legs, his head likewise seemed much too big.

To a great extent, amends were made by his attractive clothes, which suggested a man of taste and breeding. After all, he sported a very lovely, shiny, violet dolman with countless white braids and buttons. He also wore the loveliest trousers and

finest ankle boots that had ever graced the feet of a student, much less an officer. These boots were as snug on the delicate little legs as if they were a perfect fit. Now it was funny that he had donned a minerâ€™s cap and that he had accompanied his garb in back with a slim, clumsy cape that looked like wood.

Meanwhile, Marie felt that Godfather Drosselmeier had also slung an awful morning coat around his shoulders and put on a dreadful capâ€”but he was still a very dear godfather. Marie had likewise mused that no matter how delicate the little man, the godfather would never be as appealing as he. The little girl had instantly liked the nice man, and the more she looked at him, the more she realized what a gentle and kindly face he had. The light green, bulging eyes promised nothing but friendship and benevolence. It was good for the man to place a well-groomed, white-cotton beard on his chin, since you could perceive the sweet smile of the deep red lips all the more clearly.

â€œAh!â€□ Marie finally exclaimed. â€œAh! Dear Father! Who owns that darling little man over on the tree there?â€□

â€œHe,â€□ the father answered. â€œHe, dear child, should work hard for all of us. He should crack the hard nuts for us nicely. And he should belong to Luise as much as he belongs to you and to Fritz.â€□

The father then removed him cautiously from the table and, raising the wooden cape aloft, the manikin opened his mouth wide, wide, and showed two rows of very sharp, very tiny white teeth. When told to do so, Marie inserted a nut andâ€”Crack! Crack!â€”he chewed up the nut, so that the shell dropped away, and the sweet kernel itself ended up in Marieâ€™s hand.

By now, everyone, including Marie, had to know that the dainty little man was an offspring of the dynasty of Nutcrackers and was practicing his profession.

She shouted for joy, but then her father spoke:

â€œSince, dear Marie, you love Friend Nutcracker so much, you must shield and shelter him especially, even despite the fact that, as I have said, Luise and Fritz have as much right to use him as you!â€□

Marie promptly took Nutcracker in her arms and had him crack nuts, though she picked the smallest ones. That way the manikin wouldnâ€™t have to open his mouth very wide, which basically didnâ€™t look so good. Luise joined Marie, and Friend Nutcracker also had to perform his duties for Luiseâ€”which he didnâ€™t seem to mind doing, since he smiled very amiably all the time.

Fritz, meanwhile, had grown tired from all the riding and drilling, and when he heard the pleasurable cracking of nuts, he sprang over to his sisters and roared with laughter at the quaint manikin. Now that Fritz also wanted to eat nuts, the little man passed from hand to hand, unable to halt his snapping open and shut. Fritz kept shoving in the biggest and hardest nuts. All at once, they heard a double crack. Then three little teeth fell out of Nutcrackerâ€™s mouth, and his whole lower jaw turned loose and wobbly.

â€œOh, my poor, dear Nutcracker,â€□ Marie exclaimed, whisking him out of Fritzâ€™s hands.

â€œHeâ€™s a stupid, simpleminded guy!â€□ said Fritz. â€œHe wants to be a Nutcracker, but he has no decent teeth. He probably doesnâ€™t understand his own work. Hand him over, Marie! He has to chew up nuts for me, even if he loses his remaining teethâ€”even his entire jaw in the bargain. Who cares about that good-for-nothing?!â€□

â€œNo! No!â€□ Marie wept. â€œYouâ€™re not going to get himâ€”my dear Nutcracker! Just look at the way he watches me so sorrowfully and shows me his little, injured mouth! But youâ€™re a coldhearted person, Fritzâ€”you beat your

horses and you even let a soldier be shot dead!â€□

â€œThatâ€™s the way it has to be, you just donâ€™t understand,â€□ cried Fritz. â€œAnyway, Nutcracker belongs to me as much as he belongs to you! Hand him over!!â€□

Marie began sobbing hard and she quickly wrapped up the sick Nutcracker in her tiny handkerchief. The parents came over with Godfather Drosselmeier, who, to Marieâ€™s great regret, sided with Fritz.

However, her father said: â€œI deliberately placed Nutcracker under Marieâ€™s protection. And now that I see she needs him, she has full power over Nutcracker with no interference from anyone. Incidentally, Iâ€™m very surprised that Fritz demands further services from somebody who has been injured in service. After all, as a good military man, he should know that wounded soldiers never line up in rank and file.â€□

Fritz was very ashamed and, without concerning himself any further about nuts and about Nutcracker, he stole over to the other side of the table. There, after setting the appropriate outposts, the Hussars had gone to their night quarters.

As for Marie, she hunted down Nutcrackerâ€™s little lost teeth. Around his wounded chin, she had wrapped a lovely white ribbon, which she had detached from her frock and bound up. The poor little man had looked very pale and frightened, and so Marie had wrapped him more gingerly than before in her cloth. Cradling him in her arms like a baby, she looked at the lovely pictures in the new picture book, which lay out today among all the other gifts.

Contrary to her usual behavior, Marie got quite angry when Godfather Drosselmeier kept laughing and asking how she managed to remain so lovely despite that thoroughly hideous manikin. Now she recalled the bizarre comparison she had drawn with Drosselmeier at first sight, and she spoke very earnestly:

â€œWho knows, dear Godfather, if you were spruced up like my dear Nutcracker, and if you had on such lovely, shiny ankle boots, who knows if you wouldnâ€™t be as beautiful as he?â€□

Marie couldnâ€™t tell why her parents laughed so loudly and why Supreme Court Counselor developed a red nose and didnâ€™t laugh as clearly as before. There must have been a special reason.

Marvels

When you step through the door, into the home of the medical counselor, youâ€™ll find a tall glass cabinet on the broad wall to your left. The shelves store all the lovely presents that are given to the children every year. Luise was still very little when her father ordered the cabinet from a very skillful cabinetmaker. The man inserted the panes so brightlyâ€”indeed, he knew how to equip the entire showcase so adroitly that everything inside looked almost shinier and lovelier than if you were holding it yourself.

The top shelf, unattainable for Marie and Fritz, held Drosselmeierâ€™s artworks. Right below was the shelf for the picture books. The two lowest shelves could be filled by Marie and Fritz, however they wished. But usually, Marie assigned the bottom shelf for her dolls to live on, while, on the shelf overhead, Fritz drove his troops into the cantonments.

The same thing had happened today. While Fritz had stationed his Hussars overhead, Marie had put FrÃ¤ulein Trutchen aside, had placed the new and

spruced-up doll in the very elegantly appointed room, and had invited herself to some delicious confectionary with Marie.

The room was appointed very elegantlyâ€”so Iâ€™ve said, and itâ€™s also true. For I donâ€™t know if you, my attentive reader Marie, like little Miss Stahlbaum (you already know that she too is called Marie), ah! I wonder if the little girl has a small, lovely, flowery sofa like this Marie. Do they have several darling little chairs, a dainty tea tableâ€”and above all, a little spic-and-span bed, where the prettiest dolls rest?

All these things were in the corner of the cabinet, whose walls were papered here with little parti-colored pictures. And you can imagine that the new doll, who, as Marie learned that same evening, was named FrÃ¤ulein ClÃ¤rchen, had to feel very wonderful in this room.

It was late eveningâ€”indeed, midnight was approaching, and Drosselmeier had long since gone home. However, Marie and Fritz still couldnâ€™t leave the glass cabinet, no matter how much their mother kept ordering them to finally get to bed.

â€œItâ€™s true!â€□ Fritz exclaimed at last. â€œThose poor guys!â€□ (He meant his Hussars!) â€œThey want to have their rest too. And so long as Iâ€™m here, no one dares to catch forty winksâ€”I already know that!â€□

Fritz left, but Marie begged and begged: â€œJust a wee bit longerâ€”please, dear Mother, let me stay just a wee bit longer. I have to take care of a few things. When Iâ€™m done, Iâ€™ll go straight to bed!â€□

Marie was a devout and reasonable child, and so her good mother had no qualms about leaving her alone with her toys.

Still, her mother wanted to keep Marie from being all too deeply tempted by the new doll and the lovely playthings. Forgetting about the candles burning all around the wall closet, the mother snuffed all of them, so that only the lamp suspended in the middle of the ceiling spread a gentle, graceful light.

â€œCome in soon, dear Marie! Otherwise you wonâ€™t get up at the right time tomorrow!â€□ exclaimed the mother, withdrawing into the bedroom.

As soon as Marie was alone, she quickly went over to do what was quite properly on her mind and what she could not tell her mother, though she did not know why. Marie still had the wounded Nutcracker wrapped in her handkerchief, and she carried him in her arms.

Now she placed him cautiously on the table, unwrapped him softly, softly, and tended to the injuries. Nutcracker was very pale, but he beamed so ruefully and amiably that his smile shot right through her heart.

â€œAh, dear little Nutcracker,â€□ she murmured very softly. â€œPlease donâ€™t be angry at me because my brother Fritz hurt you so deeply. He didnâ€™t really mean it so badly. Heâ€™s just gotten a bit hard-hearted in the wild military. Otherwise, heâ€™s a truly fine boyâ€”you can count on it.

â€œBut now I want to nurse you very tenderly until youâ€™re fully sound and cheery again. As for reinserting your little teeth thoroughly and properly and straightening out your shoulders, Godfather Drosselmeier can take care of all thatâ€”heâ€™s an expert in such matters.â€□

However, Marie could not finish. For when she pronounced Drosselmeierâ€™s name, Friend Nutcrackerâ€™s face twisted up devilishly, and his eyes virtually emitted sparkling green prickles. But the moment Marie tried to get properly released, she was again viewed by the mournfully smiling face of honest Nutcracker. And now she knew that it was the draft and the quickly blazing ray of the lamp that had totally distorted his features.

â€œArenâ€™t I a silly little girlâ€”scared so easily that I even believe this little wooden doll can make faces? Still, I care so much for Nutcracker because heâ€™s so funny, and yet so kind, and thatâ€™s why he has to be nursed as is proper!â€□

Marie now took Friend Nutcracker by the arm, went over to the glass cabinet, huddled in front of it, and spoke to the new doll: â€œPlease, pretty please, FrÃ¤ulein ClÃ¤rchen, please give up my little bed for sick, wounded Nutcracker, and make do with the sofa as best you can. Donâ€™t forget that youâ€™re very healthy and powerful. Otherwise, you wouldnâ€™t have such thick dark red cheeks. And donâ€™t forget that very few of the most gorgeous dolls own such soft couches.â€□

In her full, shiny Christmas garb, FrÃ¤ulein ClÃ¤rchen looked very noble and very angry, and she didnâ€™t breathe a word.

â€œNow, why am I making such a fuss?â€□ said Marie.

She pulled out the bed, tucked dear Nutcracker in very gently and delicately, and wrapped him up with a beautiful little ribbon. She normally wrapped the ribbon around her body; however, this time, she wrapped it around his injured shoulders and covered him all the way up to her nose.

â€œBut he mustnâ€™t remain with naughty ClÃ¤rchen,â€□ Marie went on. She pulled up the little bed together with Nutcracker (who was lying on it) and she placed them on the top shelf. In this way, the little bed lay right next to the lovely village where Fritzâ€™s Hussars were billeted.

Marie locked the cabinet and was about to go into the bedroom, whenâ€”now listen, children!â€”when she caught a soft, soft whispering and murmuring and rustling all around, behind the oven, behind the chairs, behind the cabinets. The wall clock hummed louder and louder, but it couldnâ€™t strike.

Marie looked up. The big, gilded owl perching on the clock had lowered its wings, covering the whole timepiece and poking forth the ugly cobblestone with the hooked nose. And the noises grew louder, and words could be made out: â€œClock, tick, tock, clock, tick, tock! And everyone has to hum softly, hum softly. After all, Mouse King has a fine ear.

â€œHummmmm, hummmmmm, hummmmmm. Strike, chime, do / Soon there will be few!â€□

And the humming resounded dull and hoarse twelve times!

Marie shuddered dreadfully and she would almost have dashed off in horror if she had not spotted Godfather Drosselmeier, who sat on the wall clock in lieu of the owl, his yellow coattails dangling like wings on both sides.

However, Marie pulled herself together and she exclaimed, loudly and tearfully:

â€œGodfather Drosselmeier, Godfather Drosselmeier, what are you doing up there? Come down to me and stop frightening me, you nasty Godfather Drosselmeier!â€□

However, now a wild giggling and whistling started all around and virtually a thousand little feet were trotting and scurrying behind the walls and virtually a thousand little candle stubs were flickering through the cracks in the floorboards. Still these werenâ€™t candle stubs, no! These were tiny, sparkling eyes. And Marie realized that mice were peering out and preparing themselves everywhere.

Soon the room reverberated with trot, trot, and hop, hop, brighter and denser squads of mice were galloping to and fro and they finally lined up in rank and file, the way Fritz stationed his soldiers before a battle.

Marie found this very funny, and, unlike some other children, she didnâ€™t have a natural aversion to mice. Indeed, she was about to shed any terror she might

have felt, when all at once the room began to whistle so sharply and so outrageously that she had to shudder! Ah, what did she notice now?

No, truly, my honored reader Fritz, I know that your heart is in the right place, just like the heart of the wise and bold General Fritz Stahlbaum. But if you had seen what Marie now saw, you would have truly dashed away. I even feel that you would have leaped into bed and pulled the cover much farther over your ears than necessary.

Ah! Poor Marie could not do even that. For just listen, children. Right at her feet, as if driven by subterranean force, the ground spurted out sand and lime and crumbling wall stones, and seven mouse heads with seven brightly sparkling crowns loomed high from the ground, hissing and whistling quite unbearably.

Soon the mouse body, to whose neck the seven heads were attached, likewise worked its way out completely, and the large mouse, adorned with seven diadems, exulted in its full chorus. Squeaking loudly three times, the mouse faced the entire army, which suddenly got moving. Hott, hott, trott, trott, it headed straight toward the cabinet, ah, straight toward Marie, who was standing right up against the glass door.

Marieâ€™s heart had beaten so loudly in fear and terror that she thought it might burst out of her chest, and she would then have to die. But now she felt as if the blood were frozen in her veins. Half fainting, she staggered backward, hearing klirr, klirr, purr, purr, and the glass pane of the cabinet, elbowed by Marie, collapsed in fragments.

At that moment, Marie did feel a truly sharp pain in her left arm, but her heart suddenly felt much lighter. She now heard no squeaking or piping; everything was very still. And even though she didnâ€™t care to have a look, she did believe that the mice, frightened by the tinkling of the glass shards, had retreated to their own holes.

But just what was that?

Right behind Marie, strange noises were now heard from the cabinet, and very fine voices resounded: â€œWake up, wake up, to the battle this very night! Wake up, wake up to the battle!â€□ And harmonious chimes jingled sweetly and gracefully.

â€œAh! Thatâ€™s my little glockenspiel,â€□ cried Marie, jumping aside.

Now she saw a bizarre lighting in the cabinet, a puttering and fiddling around. There were several dolls, hurrying and scurrying about, and fighting with their skinny arms.

All at once, Nutcracker sat up, flung the cover far away, and leaped out of bed with both feet, shouting: â€œCrack, crack, crack! Foolish mice pack! Crick, crack, real sack!â€□ And with that, Nutcracker drew his little sword and waved it in the air and cried: â€œYou, my dear friends and vassals and brothers, do you wish to help me in the hard struggle?â€□

Three Scaramouches promptly retorted, as did one Pantaloon, four chimney sweeps, two zitherists, and one drummer: â€œYessir, we submit to you in steadfast devotion, and we march with you into death, struggle, and victory!â€□

And they followed the passionate Nutcracker, who dared to make the perilous leap from the top shelf. It was no use their jumping. For not only did they wear rich garments of cloth and silk, but there wasnâ€™t much more inside them than chaff and cotton. That was why they plopped down like sacks of wool.

Poor Nutcracker would certainly have broken his arms and his legs. Forâ€”just imagineâ€”it was nearly two feet high above the shelf where he was standing until the bottom, and his body was as brittle as if carved out of linden wood. Yes indeed!

Nutcracker would have certainly broken his arms and his legs if, in the moment of his leap, FrÃ¤ulein ClÃ¤rchen had not also jumped from the sofa and caught the heroâ€™s drawn sword in her soft arms.

â€œAh, you dear, sweet ClÃ¤rchen!â€□ Marie sobbed. â€œHow I misunderstood you! You would have certainly been glad to give up your little bed to Friend Nutcracker!â€□

But now FrÃ¤ulein ClÃ¤rchen spoke, pressing the young hero gently against her silken breast: â€œIf you do not wish, oh lord, sick and wounded as you are, to join the struggle and the peril, then see how your courageous vassals, belligerent and certain of victory, gather together. Scaramouch, Pantaloon, Chimney Sweep, Zitherist, and Drummer are already downstairs. And the coat-of-arms figures on my shelf actually throb and thump noticeably! You may wish, sir, to rest in my arms or watch your victory from my plumed hat!â€□

Those were ClÃ¤rchenâ€™s words. But Nutcracker was so very unruly and he kicked so hard that ClÃ¤rchen had to drop him on the floor. However, at that instant, Nutcracker knelt down politely on one knee and whispered:

â€œOh, my lady, I will remember you in charm and grace while I tussle and struggle!â€□

ClÃ¤rchen bent down so deep that she was able to clutch Nutcrackerâ€™s skinny arm, and she gently pulled him up. Then she quickly detached herself with her multispangled girdle and she was about to hang it around Fritzâ€™s neck. But Fritz stepped back two paces, put his hand on his chest, and spoke very solemnly:

â€œDo not, oh my lady, wish to waste your grace on me.â€□ He faltered, took a deep breath, and then he tore the ribbon from Marieâ€™s shouldersâ€”he pressed the ribbon against his lips. Fritz now hung the ribbon around his waist like an officerâ€™s sash. And then, boldly swinging his naked sword, quickly and nimbly, he sprang like a tiny bird across the ridge on the floor. You must notice, very gentle and excellent readers, that when Nutcracker had come alive, he had quite clearly felt all the love and kindness that Marie had shown him. It was only because she had become so good that Fritz did not even want to accept and wear FrÃ¤uleinâ€™s ribbon, although it shone brightly and looked very lovely. Good, loyal Nutcracker preferred getting all spruced up with Marieâ€™s simple little ribbon.

Now what comes next?

When Nutcracker springs down, the squealing and squeaking likewise resume.

Ah! The obnoxious crews of countless mice stay under the big table, and the horrible mouse with the seven heads looms over all of them!

What is next?!

The Battle

â€œBeat to the general march, my loyal vassal, Drummer!â€□ Nutcracker yelled. Drummer instantly rolled the drum so artistically that the panes of the glass cabinet shivered and shuddered. The interior cracked and clabbered, and Marie realized something about the covers of all the boxes in which Fritzâ€™s army was billeted. The covers violently jumped up, and the soldiers leaped out and down in the bottom shelf, where they collected in glossy teams.

Nutcracker scurried to and fro, speaking enthusiastic words to the troops: â€œNo dog of a trumpeter stirs and shifts!â€□ Nutcracker shrieked angrily. Then he quickly turned to Pantaloon, who grew somewhat pale, his nose wobbling and

wobbling. Nutcracker spoke solemnly:

â€œGeneral, I am well aware of your courage and your experience. The goals here are a rapid survey and a use of the moment. I entrust you with the command of all the cavalries and artilleries. You donâ€™t need a horse; youâ€™ve got very long legs and you can gallop quite decently. Now carry out your vocation.â€

Pantaloon immediately squeezed his long, dry fingers against his mouth, and he crowed so piercingly that it sounded like a hundred bright trumpets blowing cheerfully away. A neighing and stamping now emerged in the cabinet, and lo and behold: Fritzâ€™s cuirassiers and dragoons and especially the shiny new Hussars marched out and soon halted down below on the floor.

Now regiment upon regiment defiled past Nutcracker with flying colors and fife and drum and presented itself in rank and file across the floor of the room. However, Fritzâ€™s cannons then rolled up, clanking, and surrounded by the cannoneers, and soon the cannons went boomâ€”boom, and Marie saw the sugar peas smash into the thick pile of mice that were covered with white powder and were very ashamed. Above all, however, they suffered great damage by a heavy battery, which had rolled up on Mamaâ€™s footstool, and boomâ€”boomâ€”boom and shot gingerbreads in succession and under the mice, which made them drop.

But then the mice came nearer and nearer and they even over-ran a few cannons; which soundedâ€”prrâ€”prrâ€”prr, and in the smoke and dust, Marie could scarcely see what was happening. Yet so much was certain: Every corps fought with supreme vehemence, and for a long time victory swung back and forth. The mice kept developing more and more masses; and their tiny silvery pills, which they hurled very cleverly, were now striking the interior of the glass cabinet. ClÃ¤rchen and Trutchen desperately scurried about, wringing their little hands sore.

â€œShould I die in the flower of my youth?! I, the loveliest of the dolls?!â€ cried ClÃ¤rchen.

â€œHave I preserved myself so well as to perish here inside my four walls?â€ cried Trutchen.

They flung their arms around each other and they bawled so dreadfully that you could hear them despite the huge racket. For, gentle reader, you barely have an inkling of the uproar that now began:

Prrâ€”prrâ€”puddâ€”piddâ€”taratantaraâ€”taratantaraâ€”boomâ€”boomâ€”boomâ€”all tangled up!

And Mouse King and mice squealed and shrieked, and they again heard Nutcrackerâ€™s tremendous voice issuing useful orders, and they watched Nutcracker as he marched over the battalions standing in the line of fire. Pantaloon launched a few brilliant cavalry attacks and covered himself with glory.

But Fritzâ€™s Hussars were pelted by the mouse artillery with ugly, smelly bullets, which left nasty stains on their red jerkinsâ€”and that is why they didnâ€™t care to go ahead.

Furthermore, Pantaloon ordered them to wheel to the left. And in the enthusiasm of commanding, he did likewise, and so did his dragoons and cuirassiersâ€”that is, they all wheeled to the left and went home. In so doing, the battery perching on the footstool was endangered. And it wasnâ€™t very long before a dense squad of very hideous mice charged so heavily that the entire footstool toppled over together with cannons and cannoneers. Nutcracker, who seemed very dazed, ordered the right wing to retreat. You knowâ€”oh my experienced listener Fritzâ€”that a retreat is almost the same as a flight. And you already join me in mourning because of the misfortune that afflicted the army of little Marie as loved by Nutcracker!

But avert your eyes from this disaster and view the left wing of Nutcrackerâ €™s army, where everything is still good, and much is to be expected from the general and the army. During the most heated fighting, quiet, quiet masses of mouse cavaliers had come debouching out from under the dresser and, amid noisy, gruesome squealing, they had thrown themselves on the left wing of Nutcrackerâ €™s armyâ€”but what resistance they encountered! Slowly, as the difficulties of the terrain allowed, they had to pass the ridge of the cabinet. The corps bearing the coat of arms had advanced under the leadership of two Chinese emperors, and had formed itself ***en carrÃ© plaine***.

These brave, splendid, and colorful troops, which consisted of many gardeners, Tyroleans, Tunguses, barbers, Harlequins, cupids, lions, tigers, apes, and long-tailed monkeys, fought with great courage, deep composure, and tough endurance. This battalion of elitists, showing Spartan boldness, would have torn victory from the foe, if a daring enemy horse captain had not recklessly plunged forward and bitten off the head of one Chinese emperor, who, in falling, would have then killed two Tunguses and a long-tailed monkey. The result was a hole through which the enemy pushed in, and soon the entire battalion was chewed up. However, the enemy had little profit from this atrocity. Just as a bloodthirsty mouse cavalierist chewed up a bold opponent straight to the middle, the mouse was given a small printed slip of paper down his throat, from which he promptly died. But did this help Nutcrackerâ€™s army, which, having begun its retreat, now drew farther and farther, losing more and more men, so that unfortunate Nutcracker was left with just a tiny squad right in front of the glass cabinet?

â€œThe reserves step forward! Pantaloon, Scaramouch, Drummerâ€”where are you?â€□ Nutcracker was hollering, hoping for fresh troops, which were to be deployed out of the glass cabinet. Indeed, a few brown men and women actually emerged with gingerbreads, golden faces, hats and helmets in advance. But they fought so clumsily that they struck none of the enemies; and soon they would have even knocked Commander Nutcrackerâ€™s cap off his head.

The enemy chasseurs also bit off their legs, so that they toppled over, killing a few of Nutcrackerâ€™s comrades-in-arms. Nutcracker was now densely surrounded by the enemy, in the highest fear and distress. He wanted to jump across the cabinet ridge, but his legs were too short. ClÃ¤rchen and Trutchen lay there unconsciousâ€”they couldnâ€™t help. Hussars and dragoons sprang merrily past him and into the fray! He now yelled in utter despair: â€œA horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse!â€□

At that instant, two enemy tirailleurs grabbed him by his wooden cape and, triumphantly squealing out of seven throats, Mouse King came leaping up. Marie could no longer contain herself. â€œOh, my poor Nutcracker! My poor Nutcracker! â€□ she sobbed, snatching her left shoe and, not quite aware of what she was doing, she flung her shoe into the thickest squad of miceâ€”at their king! At that moment, everything seemed to fade and waft away. But Marie felt an even sharper pain in her left armâ€”sharper than beforeâ€”and she fainted dead to the world.

The Illness

When Marie awoke as if from a deathly coma, she found herself in her little bed. The sun shone, twinkling and sparkling through the icy windows into the room. Right next to Marie sat a stranger, whom she soon recognized as the surgeon Dr.

Wendelstern. He murmured softly: â€œSheâ€™s awake.â€

Now her mother came over and scrutinized her anxiously. â€œAh, dear Mother,â€ whispered little Marie, â€œare all the ugly mice now gone, and is good Nutcracker saved?â€

â€œDonâ€™t talk such nonsense, dear Marie!â€ her mother replied. â€œWhat do the mice have to do with Nutcracker? But you, you naughty child. Youâ€™ve caused us so much worry and anguish. Thatâ€™s what happens when children are willful and disobey their parents. Yesterday, you played with your dolls until late at night. You grew drowsy, and perhaps you were startled by a protruding mouse, which is usually not found in this area. In any case, you shoved your arm into a pane in the glass cabinet. The cut was so deep that Dr. Wendelstern, who removed the glass fragments from the wounds, felt that if the glass had sliced an artery, you would have retained a stiff arm or even bled to death.

â€œThank goodness that when I awoke at midnight and missed you so late, I got up and stepped into the living room. You were lying unconscious on the floor right next to the glass cabinet, bleeding torrents. I was so scared that I nearly blacked out myself. There you lay, and scattered all round you were many of Fritzâ€™s lead soldiers and other dolls, shattered coats of arms and gingerbread men. Nutcracker, however, lay on your bleeding arm, and not far from here lay your left shoe.â€

â€œOh, Mama! Mama darling!â€ Marie broke in. â€œJust look! Those were the traces of the great clash between the dolls and the mice. And thatâ€™s why I was startledâ€”when the mice wanted to capture poor Nutcracker, who was in command of the army of dolls. I hurled my shoe at the mice, but I donâ€™t know what happened next.â€

Dr. Wendelstern winked at the mother, who spoke very gently to Marie: â€œLet it be, my dear child! Calm down, the mice are all gone, and Nutcracker is standing in the glass cabinet, healthy and cheery.â€

Now the medical officer came into the room and he had a long talk with Dr. Wendelstern. Next the medical officer felt Marieâ€™s pulse. And she heard something about a wound fever.

Marie had to stay in bed and take medicine. And she did so for several days, even though she didnâ€™t feel sick or uneasy aside from some pains in her arm. She knew that Nutcracker had escaped the battle safe and sound, and at times she felt as if she were dreaming that he spoke to her quite lucidly though mournfully:

â€œMarie, dearest lady, I already owe you a great deal. But you can do even more for me.â€

She pondered and pondered, but it was no use, she couldnâ€™t figure out what Nutcracker meant.

The girl couldnâ€™t play at all because of her injured arm. And if she wanted to read or to leaf through one of the picture books, her head swam, and she was forced to stop looking.

Time must now have been inching along very slowly, and Marie could hardly wait until twilight, when Mother would sit at her bedside and read a lot to her or tell her lovely stories. Mother had just finished the wonderful tale of Prince Fakardin, when the door opened, and Godfather Drosselmeier walked in, saying: â€œNow I really have to see the sick and wounded girl for myself.â€

The instant Marie spotted Godfather Drosselmeier in his yellow jacket, she so vividly recalled the night when Nutcracker lost the battle with the mice. Now she involuntarily exclaimed to her godfather:

â€œOh, Godfather Drosselmeier, you were quite ugly. I saw you perching on the clock and muffling it with your wings, to keep it from striking loudly. Otherwise the mice would have been swept away. I heard what you shouted at Mouse King! Why didnâ€™t you help Nutcracker, why didnâ€™t you help me, you ugly Godfather Drosselmeier? Isnâ€™t it all your fault that I have to lie in bed, sick and injured?â€

The mother, quite terrified, asked: â€œWhatâ€™s wrong with you, dear Marie? â€

But Drosselmeier was making very bizarre faces and he spoke in a snarling and monotonous voice:

â€œPendulum, had to hum, didnâ€™t wish to fit, clocks, clocks, clock pendulum, had to hum, softly hum, bells boom, bells blast, limp and lame and honk and hunk, doll girl, donâ€™t worry, scurry, ring the bell, bell is rung, bell is sung, to drive away Mouse King today, now the owl comes flying fast, pack and pick and pick and pack, chimes are jingly, clocks, hum, hum, pendulums have to hum, pick wouldnâ€™t stick, hum and hum and purr and purr!â€ Marie gaped at Godfather Drosselmeier because he looked very different and far uglier than usual, and because he kept swinging his right arm as if he were a marionette. She would have been truly horrified at the godfather if the mother hadnâ€™t been present, and if Fritz, having sneaked in, hadnâ€™t finally interrupted the godfather by laughing very loud.

â€œOh, my, Godfather Drosselmeier! Youâ€™re much too funny again today! Youâ€™re gesticulating like my jumping jack, whom I tossed behind the stove long ago!â€

The mother remained very earnest and she said: â€œDear Herr Godfather, this is quite a strange joke. What are you aiming at?â€

â€œHeavens!â€ retorted Drosselmeier, laughing. â€œHave you forgotten my charming clockmaker ditty? I always sing it for patients like Marie.â€

Now he settled at her bedside, saying:

â€œJust donâ€™t be angry that I didnâ€™t hack out all of Mouse Kingâ€™s fourteen eyes for you, but I couldnâ€™t have managed. Instead, Iâ€™ll do something delightful for you.â€

Drosselmeier reached into his pocket and what he now softly, softly produced was: Nutcracker. The godfather had skillfully and solidly reinserted Nutcrackerâ €™s lost teeth and straightened out his jaw.

Marie was utterly overjoyed, and Mother said, smiling:

â€œNow do you see that Godfather Drosselmeier means you no harm with your Nutcracker?â€

â€œBut Marie,â€ the godfather broke in, â€œyou must admit that Nutcracker doesnâ€™t actually have a great physique and that his face cannot exactly be called handsome. If you like, I can tell you how such ugliness came into his family and was handed down. Or do you happen to know the story of Princess Pirlipat, Mouserinkâ€™s witch, and the artistic clockmaker?â€

â€œNow listen,â€ Fritz unexpectedly interrupted. â€œListen, Godfather Drosselmeier. You inserted the teeth correctly in Nutcrackerâ€™s mouth, and his jaw is no longer so wobbly. But why is he lacking a sword? Why didnâ€™t you give him a sword?â€

â€œOh, my,â€ Drosselmeier retorted quite indignantly. â€œWhy must you be grumpy and grouchy about everything, boy? What do I care about Nutcrackerâ€™s sword? I healed his bodyâ€”let him obtain a sword as he likes.â€

â€œYouâ€™re right,â€□ cried Fritz. â€œHeâ€™s a capable guy. Heâ€™ll know where to find weapons!â€□

â€œWell, Marie,â€□ the godfather went on. â€œDo you know the tale of Princess Pirlipat?â€□

â€œNo, I donâ€™t,â€□ Marie replied. â€œTell us, dear Godfather, tell us!â€□

â€œI hope,â€□ said the mother, â€œI hope, dear Godfather, that your story wonâ€™t be as gruesome as the stories you normally tell.â€□

â€œBy no means,â€□ answered Drosselmeier. â€œQuite the contrary! What I have the honor of reciting is quite humorous.â€□

â€œTell us, oh, tell us, Godfather!â€□ cried the children, and Drosselmeier began.

The Tale of the Hard Nut

Pirlipatâ€™s mother was a kingâ€™s wife, hence a queen, and in the moment of her birth, Pirlipat herself was a born princess. The king was beside himself for joy over his beautiful little daughter lying in the cradle. He exulted loudly, he danced and pranced on one leg, and he kept hollering, â€œHurray! Has anybody ever seen anybody more beautiful?â€□

All the ministers, generals, presidents, magistrates, and staff officers hopped on one leg just like the sovereign and shouted: â€œNo! Never!â€□

Indeed, there was no denying that no more beautiful child than Princess Pirlipat had been born since the dawn of time. Her little face was virtually woven out of lily-white and rosy red silk flakes, her little eyes were a vivid, sparkling azure, and her curls twisted in a full head of shiny gold threads. In addition, Pirlipat brought two rows of small pearly teeth into the world, and two hours later, when the grand chancellor tried to examine her facial lineaments more closely, she bit his finger so hard that he shrieked: â€œOh, Jiminy!â€□ Then again, others claim that he yelled, â€œOwww!â€□ Opinions are sharply divided even today.

In any case, she really did bite the chancellorâ€™s finger, and now the delighted populace knew that intellect and intelligence dwelt inside Pirlipatâ€™s little body, which was as beautiful as that of an angel.

Everybody was delighted. Only the queen was very anxious and nervousâ€”no one knew why. What especially struck people was that she had the cradle guarded very carefully. Aside from the trabants who occupied every threshold, and aside from the pairs of ladies-in-waiting, who had to sit close to the cradle, six other ladies were scattered around the room, night by night.

However, what seemed quite foolish and unfathomable was that each of these six ladies-in-waiting had to take a tomcat in her lap and stroke him all night long, compelling him to ruminate constantly.

It would be impossible, dear children, for you to guess why Pirlipatâ€™s mother made all these arrangements. But I know why and I will tell you now.

It happened that many very enchanting princes and marvelous kings had once gathered at the court of Pirlipatâ€™s father, which is why the entire court shone gleefully, and why countless plays, balls, and tournaments were put on. To show he didnâ€™t lack for gold and silver, the king wanted to thrust his hand properly into the royal treasury and lavish a decent amount. Having been secretly informed by

the supreme royal kitchen master that the court astronomer had scheduled the slaughter of pigs, the king ordered a huge sausage feast. Then he jumped into the carriage and personally invited all the kings and princes himselfâ€”purely for a spoonful of soup, to enjoy the surprise of the magnificent delight.

Now the king spoke very amiably to the queen: â€œYou know, my darling, how much I love sausages!â€□

The queen knew what the king was driving at. He meant simply that she ought to submit to the very useful business of making sausages, as she herself had done in the past.

The supreme treasurer had to promptly deliver the huge golden sausage cauldron and the silver casseroles to the kitchen. They lit a big sandalwood fire, the queen tied on her damask kitchen apron, and soon the sweet fragrances of the sausage soup were steaming out of the cauldron. The pungent aroma wafted all the way to the Privy Council. The king, imbued with pleasure, couldnâ€™t help himself: â€œWith your permission, gentlemen!â€□ he shouted. He then flew into the kitchen, embraced the queen, stirred the soup with his gold scepter, and, calming down, he returned to the Privy Council.

They had reached the important point when the bacon was to be sliced into cubes and roasted on silver grills. The ladies-in-waiting left the kitchen because the queen wished to perform this action herself out of loyalty, fidelity, and devotion to the royal consort. However, when the bacon started to roast, they heard a very fine whispering: â€œGive me a little roast bacon, too, sister! I want to feast, tooâ€”after all, Iâ€™m a queen, too. Give me a bit of the roast bacon!â€□

The queen knew that Frau Mouserink was speaking. For many years now, she had been living in the royal palace. She claimed that she was related to the royal family, and that she herself was a queen in the land of Mousolia. And that was why she presided over a large court under the hearth. The queen was a good, charitable woman. If she didnâ€™t wish to recognize Frau Mouserink as queen and as her sister, then she could at least grant her, from the bottom of her heart, the banqueting on festive days. The queen exclaimed: â€œCome right out, Frau Mouserink. You can enjoy my bacon in any event!â€□

Frau Mouserink scurried over, hopping merrily. She leaped up to the hearth, and her delicate little paws took hold of each bit of bacon offered her by the queen.

But now all of Frau Mouserinkâ€™s male and female relatives came springing up, as did her seven sons. These sons were ill-bred boors. They overwhelmed the bacon, and the terrified queen couldnâ€™t fend them off. Luckily the royal controllerâ€™s wife came running up. She drove away the intrusive guests, managing to leave some bacon, which, following the assessment of the royal mathematician, was distributed very skillfully among all the sausages.

With drums beating and trumpets blasting, all the visiting princes and potentates, clad in splendid holiday garb, drew past, heading toward the sausage feast, whereby some of the guests were mounted on white amblers, and some rode in crystal coaches. The king welcomed them with hearty friendship and benevolence; then, as sovereign, with his crown and his scepter, he sat down at the head of the table.

In the liverwurst station, people could see that the king was turning paler and paler, gazing at the heavens. Gentle moans fled his breast, a tremendous pain seemed to be burrowing through his insides! Then, in the blood sausage station, loudly groaning and groaning, weeping and wailing, he sank back in his armchair, with both hands over his face.

All the diners sprang up from the table, and the royal physician tried in vain to check the royal pulseâ€”the king seemed to be ripped apart by a profound and nameless yowling. Finally, finally, after much coaxing, after the application of strong medicines, more than there were scorched quills, and so forth, the king seemed to have recovered somewhat. He barely stammered the words: â€œToo little bacon.â€

The queen now pathetically threw herself at his feet and cried out: â€œOh, my poor, miserable royal consort! Oh, what pains you have suffered. But now you see the culprit at your feet! Punish, punish her hard! Ah, Frau Mouserink, with her seven sons and with all her male and female relatives, has gobbled up the bacon andâ€”â€ But now the queen fell back in a dead faint.

The king furiously leaped up and yelled: â€œRoyal controllerâ€™s wife! How did it happen?â€

The controllerâ€™s wife reported whatever she knew, and the king resolved to get even with Frau Mouserink and her family for gobbling away the bacon from the sausages. The Privy Council assembled, and it decided to put Frau Mouserink on trial and to confiscate all her goods. However, the king pointed out that she could, after all, still gobble up the bacon during the procedure. So the entire matter was handed over to the royal clockmaker and the royal adept.

This man, who had the same name as Iâ€”namely, Christian Elias Drosselmeierâ€”promised, through a very special, politically shrewd operation, to drive Frau Mouserink and her family out of the palace forever and ever. Drosselmeier actually invented very tiny, very skillful devices, in which roast bacon was applied to minuscule threads that Drosselmeier set up around the home of Frau Bacongobbler.

Frau Mouserink was far too wise not to catch Drosselmeierâ€™s cunning. But none of her warnings, none of her notions could help. Lured by the sweet fragrance of the roast bacon, all of Frau Mouserinkâ€™s seven sons and many, many male and female relatives stepped into Drosselmeierâ€™s devices; and just as they were about to nibble away the bacon, they were trapped by a suddenly dropping gate and then shamefully executed right in the kitchen.

With her tiny squad, Frau Mouserink abandoned the site of terror. Grief, despair, and revenge imbued her breast. The court rejoiced heartily, but the queen was worried, for she was well acquainted with Frau Mouserinkâ€™s mentality and she knew that Frau Mouserink would not leave the deaths of her sons and relatives unavenged. And indeed, Frau Mouserink did appear just as the queen was preparing a lung puree for the royal consortâ€”a treat he especially liked. And Frau Mouserink said:

â€œMy sons, my relatives have been killed. Be careful, Your Royal Highness, make sure that Mouse Queen doesnâ€™t chew the little princess in halfâ€”make sure.â€

Thereupon she vanished again and was seen no more. But the queen was so terrified that she dropped the lung puree into the fire; and so Frau Mouserink spoiled a second royal treat, which infuriated the king.

â€œBut thatâ€™s enough for Fritz and Marie tonight. The rest will be taken care of tomorrow.â€

Marie had her own thoughts in regard to the story, and much as she asked Godfather Drosselmeier to keep going, she didnâ€™t wait to be persuaded. Instead, she jumped up: â€œToo much of a good thing is unhealthyâ€”weâ€™ll hear the

final part of the story tomorrow.â€□

Just as the counselor was about to step out the front door, Fritz asked:

â€œDo tell me, Godfather Drosselmeier, is it really true that you invented the mousetrap?â€□

â€œHow can you ask such a silly question?â€□ the mother cried. But the godfather smiled inscrutably and he murmured: â€œAm I not enough of a skillful clockmaker and not even enough to invent mousetraps?â€□

Continuation of the Tale of the Hard Nut

Now you know very well, children (Drosselmeier continued the next evening), you know very well why the queen had the gorgeous Princess Pirlipat guarded so carefully. Shouldnâ€™t the queen fear that Frau Mouserink might carry out her threats, come back, and chew the little princess to death? Drosselmeierâ€™s devices were useless against Frau Mouserinkâ€™s wisdom and insight; and only the royal astronomer, who also doubled as the kingâ€™s secret diviner and stargazer, appeared to know that only the family of Tomcat Purr would be able to keep Frau Mouserink away from the cradle of the princess. Hence it happened that each lady-in-waiting held one of the sons of that family in her lap, deftly stroking him, trying to sweeten his vast political service. Incidentally, the sons were employed at court as secret legation counsels.

One midnight, one of the two ladies sitting close to the cradle awoke out of deep sleep. Everybody around them lay there, trapped by slumberâ€”no purring, a deep and deathly hush, in which the picking of the woodworm could be heard! But how did the secret supreme lady-in-waiting feel when she spotted a huge, hideous mouse, which stood up on its hind legs, pressing its wretched face against the head of the princess?

With a shriek of dismay, the lady jumped up. Everybody awoke. That same moment, Frau Mouserink (nobody else was the big mouse on Pirlipatâ€™s cradle) scurried into a corner of the room. The legation counsels dashed after her. But too late. Frau Mouserink vanished through a crack in the floor.

Pirlipat was awakened by the uproar and she wept very lamentably. â€œThank goodness!â€□ the ladies exclaimed. â€œSheâ€™s alive!â€□

But how great was their horror when they looked for Pirlipat and saw what had become of the lovely, delicate child. Instead of her golden locks with a red and white face and an angelic head, a thick, deformed head now perched on a twisted, teensy-weensy body. The small azure eyes had turned into green, gaping, gawking eyes, and the little lips had pulled from one ear to the other.

The queen dissolved in weeping and wailing, and the royal study had to be thoroughly padded because time after time the king would run with his head against the wall, shouting lamentably: â€œOh, what a miserable monarch I am!â€□

The king realized perfectly well that it would have been better to eat the sausages without bacon and leave Frau Mouserink and her clan in peace behind the hearth. But Pirlipatâ€™s royal father wouldnâ€™t hear of it. Instead, he placed all the blame on the royal clockmaker and adept, Christian Elias Drosselmeier from Nuremberg. That was why the king issued a wise order: Drosselmeier had four weeks to restore Princess Pirlipat to her former condition or at least indicate a specific, unerring measure for doing so. Otherwise, the royal clockmaker would be doomed to a shameful death under the headsmanâ€™s ax.

Drosselmeier was not without fear, but he relied on his skill and his luck, and he promptly tackled the first operation that struck him as useful. He took Princess Pirlipat apart very adroitly, unscrewed her little hands and feet, and viewed her inner structure. But, alas, he found that the bigger the princess grew, the more shapeless she became, and he was at a lossâ€”at his witâ€™s end. He very carefully put her together again and sank into a melancholy at her cradle, which he was not allowed to leave.

The fourth week had already begun. It was Wednesday when the king peered into the cradle, his eyes sparkling furiously. Brandishing his scepter, the king exclaimed: â€œChristian Elias Drosselmeier, cure the princess, or you must die!â€ Drosselmeier started weeping bitterly, but the princess delightfully cracked nuts.

For the first time, Drosselmeier noticed that Pirlipat had been born with teeth and that she had an unusual appetite for nuts. Indeed, she had hollered so long after her transformation, until a nut happened to come her way. She promptly cracked it open, ate the kernel, and then calmed down. Since then, the ladies couldnâ€™t bring her enough nuts.

â€œOh, holy instinct of nature, eternally inscrutable sympathy of all beings,â€ cried Christian Elias Drosselmeier, â€œyou show me the gates to the mystery. I wish to knock, and the gates will open.â€

Drosselmeier then asked for permission to speak to the court astronomer, and he was taken to him under heavy guard. These two gentlemen embraced tearfully because they were close friends. Next they withdrew into a secret study, where they perused many books dealing with instincts, sympathies, antipathies, and other mysterious things.

Night broke in. The court astronomer gazed at the stars and, with the help of the very dexterous Drosselmeier, he cast the princessâ€™s horoscope. This demanded great effort, for the lines got more and more entangled. But finallyâ€”what joy. Finally it lay clearly before them that the princess, in order to undo the hideous spell and restore her beauty, had nothing to do but enjoy the sweet Krakatuk Nut.

The shell of the Krakatuk Nut was so hard that a forty-eight-pound cannon could have charged across it without breaking it. But this hard nut had to be chewed up in front of the princess by a man who had never shaved and who had never worn boots. And with closed eyes, he handed the princess the kernel. The young man could reopen his eyes only after taking seven steps backward without stumbling.

Drosselmeier and the astronomer labored uninterruptedly for three days and three nights. Now the king was having his Saturday dinner. All at once, Drosselmeier, who was to be decapitated on Sunday, at the crack of dawn, burst in joyfully and ecstatically and he announced the measure for restoring the princessâ€™s lost beauty. The king hugged Drosselmeier with intense benevolence and promised him a diamond sword, four medals, and two new Sunday coats.

â€œAfter we finish our meal,â€ the king added amiably, â€œwe can get to work right away. Make sure, dear adept, that the young unshaven and nonbooted man with the Krakatuk Nut is properly at hand. He should drink no wine earlier; otherwise heâ€™ll stumble when he tries taking seven steps backward like a crab. Afterward he can liquor up for all heâ€™s worth!â€

Drosselmeier was stunned by the kingâ€™s words, and it was not without shaking and shuddering that he managed to squeeze out a response: he had discovered the measure. Now both the Krakatuk Nut and the young man had to be

sought. But it remained doubtful whether Nut and Nutcracker could ever be found.

The fuming sovereign swung his scepter over his crowned head and he roared in a lionâ€™s voice: â€œThen weâ€™ll make do with your heads!â€□

Luckily for Drosselmeier, who was filled with terror and misery, the king had found his meal to be delicious that very day. So he was in the right mood to listen to reasonable ideas, of which the magnanimous queen had no lack. Indeed, she was deeply touched by Drosselmeierâ€™s fate. Drosselmeier pulled himself together and finally pointed out that he had gained his life by actually carrying out the kingâ€™s orders. He had been told to find the means of curing the princess and he had done so.

The king called these lame excuses and silly twaddle. But eventually, after drinking a glass of digestive, he decided that both the clockmaker and the astronomer should get going and should not return without a Krakatuk Nut in their pocket. The man who bit them open should, as the queen informed them, insert multiple public notices and various advertisements in domestic and foreign gazettes.

Drosselmeier broke off here and he promised to finish the story tomorrow evening.

Conclusion of the Tale of the Hard Nut

No sooner were the lights lit on the following evening than Godfather Drosselmeier actually showed up and continued the story.

Drosselmeier and the court astronomer had been roaming for fifteen years already without catching even a hint of the Krakatuk Nut. Now I could spend four whole weeks telling you, dear children, where they had been and what strange things they had encountered. But I wonâ€™t report on those matters. Iâ€™ll merely say that in his deep sorrow, Drosselmeier eventually felt deeply homesick for his dear hometown of Nuremberg. This yearning swept over him especially one day when he and his friend happened to be in a vast, Asian forest, smoking pipes filled with cheap tobacco.

â€œOh, beautiful, beautiful hometown of Nurembergâ€”beautiful town. If a person hasnâ€™t seen you, even though he may have traveled a lot, to London, Paris, Petrovaradin, then his heart cannot have surged. He must long for you always, long for you, oh, Nuremberg, beautiful town with its beautiful houses and windows.â€□

When Drosselmeier lamented so dolefully, the astronomer was filled with profound commiseration, and he started to bawl so deplorably that his weeping and wailing could be heard all over Asia. But then he pulled himself together, wiped the tears from his eyes, and asked:

â€œWorthy colleague, why do we sit here and blubber? Why donâ€™t we go to Nuremberg? Does it really matter where and how we seek the wretched Krakatuk Nut?â€□

â€œThatâ€™s true,â€□ Drosselmeier replied in comfort.

The two men stood up, knocked the tobacco from their pipes, and headed straight out of the Asian forest toward Nuremberg. No sooner had they arrived, than

Drosselmeier hurried over to visit his cousin, the doll maker, lacquerer, and gilder Christoph Zacharias Drosselmeier, whom he hadnâ€™t seen for many, many years.

The clockmaker told his cousin the entire story about Princess Pirlipat, Frau Mouserink, and the Krakatuk Nut. Time and again, the cousin threw his hands together and cried out in amazement: â€œOh, cousin, cousin, what wondrous things these are!â€□

Drosselmeier kept talking about his adventures on his vast travels. He had spent two years with the date king, had been disdainfully rejected by the almond prince, and had inquired in vain at the Nature Society in Eichhornshausen. In short, the clockmaker had failed everywhere to find even a trace of the Krakatuk Nut.

During this account, Christoph Zacharias had often snapped his fingers, whirled around on one foot, clicked his tongue, and cried out: â€œHm, hm, I, Ei, Oâ€”the devil take it!â€□ Finally, he threw his cap and his wig into the air, and hugged and squeezed the cousin. â€œCousin, cousin! You are safe and you are sound, I tell you, for everything and everyone must be deceiving me if I donâ€™t own the Krakatuk Nut myself!â€□

He then produced a box, from which he drew a gilt nut of medium size. â€œLook,â€□ he said, showing the nut to his cousin. â€œLook! Let me tell you about this nut.â€□

Many Christmases ago, a stranger came here, peddling a sack of nuts. Unfortunately, he got into a fight with the local nut dealer right outside my dollâ€™s cottage; so he put down his sack in order to defend himself more easily. The resident attacked the stranger because he couldnâ€™t stand having the outsider hawk nuts. At that moment, a heavily loaded truck rolled over the sack, crushing all the nuts but one, which the stranger, with a bizarre smile, offered me for a shiny twenty-penny piece from the year 1720. This struck me as wonderful. Now I happened to have such a coin in my pocket. I bought the nut and gilded it, not quite knowing why I had paid so much and why I now held the nut in such high esteem.

This was definitely the Krakatuk Nut that they had been hunting; any doubts were dispelled when they summoned the astronomer, and he scraped the gilt cleanly off with the coin. Under the gilt, they found the word â€œKrakatukâ€□ engraved in Chinese characters.

The travelers were ecstatic, and the cousin was the happiest man under the sun when Drosselmeier assured him that his fortune was made. Aside from a considerable pension, he would receive for free all gold for gilding. Both the adept and the astronomer had already put on their nightcaps and were about to hop into bed when the astronomer began: â€œMy dear colleague, all good things come in pairs. We have found not only the Krakatuk Nut, but also the young man who bites her open and hands the beauty of the kernel to the princess. I mean nobody other than your own cousinâ€™s son. No! I donâ€™t want to sleep, I want to cast the boyâ€™s horoscope tonight!â€□ Next the astronomer tore the nightcap off the boyâ€™s head and he began to observe the stars.

The boy was actually nice and well built, and he had never shaved and he had never worn boots. Granted, in his early youth, he had been a jumping jack for about two weeks; but now there wasnâ€™t even the slightest inkling of that time, for he had been educated through his fatherâ€™s efforts. During the Yule season, he wore a lovely, gold-trimmed red coat and a sword. He kept his hat under his arm and he

sported an excellent hairstyle and a bagwig. Now he stood, glowing, in his fatherâ €™s chamber, and, out of native gallantry, he cracked the nuts for the young girls, which is why they had nicknamed him Dear Little Nutcracker.

The next morning, the ecstatic astronomer threw his arms around the adept and shouted: â€œHeâ€™s the one! Weâ€™ve got him, weâ€™ve found him! But there are two things, dearest colleague, that we mustnâ€™t ignore. First of all, you have to braid your wonderful nephew a robust, wooden queue, which is linked so closely to the lower jaw that the latter can be strongly pulled. Now when we arrive at the residence, we must cautiously hide the fact that we have brought along the young man who bites open the Krakatuk Nut. Quite the contrary! He has to turn up a great deal later than we.

â€œAccording to the horoscope, several men have gnashed up a few teeth unsuccessfully, and so the king has promised that the suitor who chews up the nut and restores Pirlipatâ€™s beauty will be rewarded with the hand of the princess and with the right of succession to the throne.â€□

The doll maker cousin was quite satisfied that his boy should marry Princess Pirlipat and become prince and king, so he left him fully to the envoy. The queue that Drosselmeier braided for his young, hopeful nephew was so admirable that he put on the most brilliant experiments by chewing up the hardest peach pits.

Drosselmeier and the astronomer promptly informed the authorities of their discovery of the Krakatuk Nut, whereby the necessary arrangements were made on the spot. And when the travelers arrived with the cosmetic preparation, many attractive people, including even a few princes, had already appeared. Relying on their healthy teeth, they wanted to break the spell cast on the princess.

The envoys were horrified when they saw the princess. The tiny body with its teensy hands and feet could barely carry the shapeless head. The ugliness of the face was increased by a white cotton beard around the mouth and the chin.

Now everything occurred just as the court astronomer had read in the horoscope. Clad in shoes, one young shaver after another bit himself sore on the Krakatukâ€™s teeth and jowls without helping the princess in the least. Dentists had been summoned, and when an unfortunate suitor was being carried away half unconscious, he would sigh: â€œThat was a hard nut to crack!â€□

Now when the king, in the terror of his heart, promised his daughter and his kingdom to the suitor who would cast off the magic spell, the gentle cousin stepped forward and asked permission to start the process. Nobody but the young Drosselmeier appealed so intently to Princess Pirlipat. She placed her tiny hands on her heart and sighed quite tenderly: â€œAh! If only heâ€™ll be the one who bites open the Krakatuk Nut and becomes my husband!â€□

After young Drosselmeier very politely bowed to the king and the queen and also Princess Pirlipat, he received the Krakatuk Nut from the hands of the supreme master of ceremonies. Taking the nut between his teeth, the boy tugged at his queue andâ€”crack, crack, crackâ€”the shell crumbled into many bits and pieces. Adroitly the boy cleaned the threads still dangling from the kernel and handed it over to the princess, while bowing and scraping, whereupon he closed his eyes and began stepping backward. The princess then swallowed the kernel andâ€”oh wonder!â €”the freak vanished and instead there stood a woman of angelic beauty. Her face was virtually woven out of silk flakes that were lily-white and rosy red. Her eyes were like glowing azure, her full locks curling as if twisting like golden threads. Drums and trumpets joined the loud jubilation of the people. The king with his entire court danced on one leg as they had done at Pirlipatâ€™s birth; and the queen had to be revived with eau de cologne because she had fainted in bliss and

pleasure.

Young Drosselmeier hadnâ€™t even completed his seven steps when the tumult disrupted his self-composure; but he held out for self-control. He was just sticking out his right foot for his seventh pace, when Frau Mouserink, hideously squeaking and squealing, rose out of the floor. As a result, Drosselmeier, about to set down his own foot, stepped so hard on Frau Mouserinkâ€™s foot that he stumbled and almost lurched over.

â€œOh, misfortune!â€

In the blink of an eye, the boy became as misshapen as the princess had been. His body was shrunken, and it could barely carry the thick, malformed head with its huge, bulging eyes and its broad, dreadfully yawning maw. Instead of the queue, a narrow, wooden cape hung down his back, thereby controlling the lower jaw.

The clockmaker and the astronomer were beside themselves with dismay and horror. But then they saw Frau Mouserink bleeding and rolling on the floor. Her evil did not go unavenged, for young Drosselmeier had struck her throat so roughly with the sharp heel of his shoe that she was doomed to expire, and in peril of death, she squeaked and squealed lamentably:

â€œOh, Krakatuk, hard nut, see, the death of me. Hee hee, pee pee! Fine little Nutcracker, soon you too will be dead for all to see. Seven crowns for seven heads, Mother will pronounce you dead, Nutcracker fine will be all mine. Oh, life so fresh and red, I leave you dead! Squeal!â€ With that shriek, Frau Mouserink gave up the ghost, and her corpse was carried off by the royal oven heater.

Nobody had paid any heed to young Drosselmeier, but now the princess reminded the king of his promise. And so he immediately sent for the young hero. But when the unhappy boy stepped forward in his deformity, the princess held both hands over her face and yelled, â€œAway, away with the wretched Nutcracker!â€ The Lord Chamberlain grabbed the boyâ€™s little shoulders and threw him out the door.

The king was furious that they had tried to force a Nutcracker on him as his son-in-law. He blamed everything on the misfortune of the clockmaker and the astronomer and he barred them from ever stepping foot inside the residence again.

None of this was mentioned in the horoscope that the astronomer had cast in Nuremberg. But it didnâ€™t prevent him from observing the heavens once more. And indeed he read a number of things in the stars. He found that young Drosselmeier would do so well in his new position that he would become prince and king despite his malformation. However, his deformity would vanish only when Frau Mouserinkâ€™s sonâ€”whom she had borne after the deaths of her seven sons with seven headsâ€”had become Mouse King. That son would have to be felled by his own hand, and a lady would have to fall in love with him despite his defects.

Indeed, around Christmas, young Drosselmeier had supposedly been spotted in his fatherâ€™s chamber in Nurembergâ€”granted, as Nutcracker, yet definitely as prince!

â€œThat, children, is the tale of the hard nut. And now you know why people are apt to say: â€˜That was a hard nut to crack.â€™ And now you know why Nutcrackers are so hideous.â€ And that was how Drosselmeier concluded his story.

Marie felt that Princess Pirlipat was really a loathsome and ungrateful thing.

Fritz, on the contrary, assured her that if Nutcracker was otherwise a decent sort, he wouldnâ€™t beat around the bush with Mouse King, and he would soon regain his earlier good looks.

Uncle and Nephew

If any one of my highly esteemed readers or listeners has ever accidentally cut himself on broken glass, he will personally know how painful it is, and how awful it is altogether since it heals so slowly. Marie had to spend nearly a whole week in bed because she felt so dizzy whenever she stood up. But finally she was hale and hearty again, as ever, springing all about the room. The inside of the glass cabinet looked very appealing since trees and blossoms and houses and lovely, glowing dolls stood there, new and shiny.

Above all, Marie found her dear Nutcracker, who, erect on the second shelf, smiled at her with sound little teeth. When she gazed at her favorite to her heartâ €™s content, she suddenly felt very agitated. She saw everything Godfather Drosselmeier had told themâ€”especially the story of Nutcracker and his quarrel with Frau Mouserink and her son.

Now Marie realized that her Nutcracker could be none other than young Drosselmeier from Nurembergâ€”the likable nephew, who, alas, was hexed by Frau Mouserink. As the tale was being told, Marie didnâ€™t doubt for even an instant that the skillful clockmaker at the court of Pirlipatâ€™s father could have been anyone else but Godfather Drosselmeier himself. â€œBut why didnâ€™t Uncle help you? Why didnâ€™t he help you?â€□

That was Marieâ€™s lament, and it raged livelier and livelier inside her, while the battle she was watching focused on Nutcrackerâ€™s crown and kingdom. Werenâ€™t then all the other dolls his subjects, and wasnâ€™t it then certain that the astronomerâ€™s prophecy had come true, and that young Drosselmeier had become king of the kingdom of dolls? In properly weighing all these matters, wise Marie also believed that Nutcracker and his vassals had actually started living the moment she entrusted them with life and motion.

But that wasnâ€™t the case. The figures in the cabinet remained stationary and motionless. And Marie, far from giving up her inner conviction, put the blame on the still effective spell cast by Frau Mouserink and her seven-headed son.

â€œWell, dear Herr Drosselmeier,â€□ Marie spoke aloud to Nutcracker. â €œYou may not be able to move or to speak. But Iâ€™m well aware that you understand me and that you fully know my good intentions with you. Count on my aid if you need it. At least, I want to ask my uncle to lend a helping hand when his skill calls for it.â€□

Nutcracker remained still and quiet. But Marie felt as if a gentle sigh were breathing through the glass cabinet, whereby the panes resoundedâ€”barely audible, but wondrously charmingâ€”and a faint chimelike voice appeared to be singing: â€œLittle Marie, my guardian angel be! Yours I will be, my Marie!â€□

The girl felt a strange comfort in the icy shudders that flashed through her body. Twilight had arrived. The medical officer and Godfather Drosselmeier came into the room, and it wasnâ€™t long before Luise had set the tea table, and the family sat around, talking about all kinds of cheerful things. Marie had very quietly brought in her little armchair and settled at Drosselmeierâ€™s feet. Now when everybody held their tongue, Marie peered into Drosselmeierâ€™s face with her

big, blue eyes, and she said:

â€œI now know, dear Godfather, that my Nutcracker is really your nephew, young Drosselmeier from Nuremberg. He has become prince or rather kingâ€”all this has come true as was predicted by his companion, the astronomer. But you also know that he is on a war footing with the ugly Mouse King, the son of Frau Mouserink. Why donâ€™t you help him?â€

Marie then retold the entire account of the battle as she had witnessed it. She was often interrupted by the noisy laughter of Luise and the mother. Only Fritz and Drosselmeier remained earnest.

â€œJust where does the girl get all her nonsense from?â€ said the medical officer.

â€œGoodness,â€ the mother replied. â€œWhy, sheâ€™s got a lively imagination. These are just dreams created by her ardent fever.â€

â€œNone of this is true,â€ said Fritz. â€œMy red Hussars arenâ€™t such cowards! Goodness, gracious me! Darn it all! How else would I come down?â€

With a bizarre smile, Godfather Drosselmeier took Marie on his lap and spoke more gently than ever:

â€œWhy, dear Marie, youâ€™ve been given more than I, than any of us. Like Pirlipat, you are a native-born princess, for you rule a bright and lovely kingdom. But youâ€™ll have to suffer a lot if you want to take charge of poor, deformed Nutcracker, since Mouse King persecutes him anywhere and everywhere. However, Iâ€™m not the one who can save him! Only you can rescue him. Be strong and loyal.â€

Neither Marie nor anybody else knew what Drosselmeier meant. Instead, the medical officer found those words so strange that he checked Drosselmeierâ€™s pulse: â€œMost worthy friend, you have a serious case of cerebral congestion. Let me write you a prescription.â€

But the mother thoughtfully shook her head and murmured: â€œI can catch Godfather Drosselmeierâ€™s drift, but I canâ€™t articulate it clearly.â€

Victory

It wasnâ€™t long before Marie was awakened by a tapping in the moonlit nightâ€”a strange knocking that seemed to originate in a corner of the room. It sounded like small stones being hurled and rolled to and fro, with a quite repulsive squeaking and squealing in between.

â€œAh! The mice, the mice are returning!â€ Marie shouted in horror, and she tried to wake up her mother. But every sound stuck in her throat. Indeed, she couldnâ€™t stir at all when she saw Mouse King burrowing his way through a hole in the wall. With sparkling eyes and crowns, he then scurried about the room. Finally, with a tremendous jump, he landed on the nightstand right at Marieâ€™s bedside: â€œHee, hee, hee, you must give me your sugar peas, your marzipanâ€”see! Otherwise Iâ€™ll chew up your Nutcracker, heeâ€”your Nutcracker, see!â€ That was Mouse King, hideously munching and crunching with his teeth; and then he swiftly jumped back through the hole.

Marie was so frightened by the gruesome spectacle that when she woke up the next morning, she was utterly pale, and so agitated that she was unable to utter a word. A hundred times, she wanted to tell her mother or Luise or at least Fritz what had happened to her. But then she thought: â€œWill anyone believe me, and wonâ

€™t they laugh their heads off in the bargain?â€□ But one thing was clear. In order to save Nutcracker, she would have to hand over her sugar peas and her marzipan.

That evening, she took as many of those supplies as she had, and she placed them on the ledge of the cabinet. The next morning her mother said: â€œI just donâ €™t know where the mice are coming from in our living room. Look at poor Marie! Theyâ€™ve gobbled up all your sweets!â€□

And it was true. The greedy Mouse King didnâ€™t much care for filled marzipan, but he had gnawed on it with his sharp teeth, so that it had to be thrown away. Marie shrugged off the loss of the sweets; she was so delighted that, as she believed, her Nutcracker was saved.

Still, how did she feel the following night when the squeaking and squealing were right on her ears? Ah, Mouse King was back. His eyes sparkled more dreadfully than on the previous night, and the whistling between his teeth was even more repulsive.

â€œYou have to give me your sugar dolls and your tragacanth dolls, you little thing. Otherwise, you little thing, Iâ€™ll chew up your Nutcracker, your Nutcracker!â€□ And the gruesome Mouse King sped away!

The next morning, Marie was very sad as she went over to the cabinet and most dolefully gazed at her sugar and tragacanth dolls. But her pain was valid. For, my attentive listener, Marie, you may not believe what loving figures shaped out of sugar and tragacanth belonged to little Marie Stahlbaum.

Next to her, a very handsome shepherd with a shepherdess was grazing an entire herd of milk white lambs, accompanied by his bold little dog. There were also two postmen carrying mail, and four very attractive couplesâ€”cleanly dressed youths with wonderfully clad girls swinging in Russian swings. Behind several dancers stood the Maid of Orleans, by whom Marie didnâ€™t set much store. But deep in the corner there stood a red-cheeked boy, Marieâ€™s favorite, and the tears poured out of her eyes.

â€œAh,â€□ she cried, turning to Nutcracker. â€œDear Drosselmeier, what wouldnâ€™t I do to save you? But itâ€™s so very difficult!â€□

Meanwhile, Nutcracker looked so tearful thatâ€”as if seeing Mouse Kingâ€™s seven jaws wide open and aiming at devouring the miserable youthâ€”Marie decided to sacrifice everything. Hence, that evening, she placed all the sweet dolls, just as she had placed the sweets, on the ridge of the glass cabinet. She kissed the shepherd, the shepherdess, and the lambs. Then she finally brought her favorite, the little red-cheeked child of the tragacanth, from the corner, and she slipped him all the way back. The Maid of Orleans had to be moved to the first row.

â€œNo! This is too awful!â€□ the mother exclaimed the next morning. â €œSome huge, nasty mouse must be wreaking havoc in the glass cabinet, for all of Marieâ€™s beautiful sugar dolls have been gnawed on and nibbled on.â€□ Marie couldnâ€™t help weeping, but she soon smiled again, for she thought to herself: â €œWhat does it matter? Nutcrackerâ€™s been saved!â€□

In the evening, the mother told Drosselmeier about the mischief worked by a mouse in the childrenâ€™s cabinet. â€œItâ€™s appalling that we canâ€™t destroy the obnoxious mouse thatâ€™s acting up in the glass cabinet, gobbling away poor Marieâ€™s sweets.â€□

â€œGoodness,â€□ Fritz broke in cheerfully. â€œThe baker downstairs has a fabulous gray cat. Iâ€™ll bring him here. Heâ€™ll soon put an end to the issue and bite off the mouseâ€™s headâ€”whether itâ€™s Frau Mouserink herself or her son, Mouse King.â€□

â€œAnd,â€□ the mother went on with a laugh, â€œthe cat will jump around on chairs and tables and throw down cups and glasses and commit a thousand other kinds of mayhem.â€□

â€œOh, not at all!â€□ Fritz retorted. â€œThe bakerâ€™s cat is very deft. I wish I could climb up to the tip of the roof as delicately as that cat.â€□

â€œJust no tomcat at night,â€□ said Luise, who couldnâ€™t stand cats.

â€œActually,â€□ said the medical officer, â€œactually, Fritz is right. Meanwhile we can set a trap! Donâ€™t we have one?â€□

â€œGodfather Drosselmeier can do the best job,â€□ said Fritz. â€œAfter all, he invented the mousetrap!â€□ Everyone laughed.

When the mother assured them that no trap was to be found in the house, Drosselmeier announced that he owned several. He went home and an hour later he returned with an excellent mousetrap. Now the godfatherâ€™s tale of the hard nut grew lively, even apparent for Fritz and Marie. When the cook was roasting the bacon, Marie shivered and shuddered.

Fully imbued with the tale and its marvels, she said to well-known Dore: â€œAh, my queen! Just watch out for Frau Mouserink and her family.â€□

Fritz, however, had drawn his sword: â€œYes! Just let them come! Iâ€™ll teach them a thing or two!â€□ But everybody under and on the hearth remained calm.

Now when Drosselmeier tied the bacon to a fine thread and gently, gently placed the trap next to the glass cabinet, Fritz exclaimed: â€œBe careful, clockmaker, donâ€™t let Mouse King play any tricks on you!â€□

Oh, how miserable Marie was the following night! Her arm was ice-cold, she moved to and fro, her cheeks were raw and wretched, and the squealing and squeaking filled her ears. The repugnant Mouse King sat on her shoulder, and he driveled, bloodred, out of the seven gaping maws. And with munching and crunching teeth, he hissed into Marieâ€™s ear, hissed with terror and horror!

â€œHiss out, hiss out, donâ€™t enter the house, donâ€™t join the feastâ€”that went to the trap! Hiss out, hiss out, hand over, hand over, all your picture books, plus the dress, plus no rest! Just for you to know, poor Nutcracker will miss all night, heâ€™ll bite out of sight! Hee, hee, dee, dee, squeal, squeak!â€□

Marie was filled with sadness and sorrow. The next morning, she looked quite pale and bewildered when her mother said: â€œThe wicked mouse still hasnâ€™t been caught!â€□ Believing that Marie was mourning her sweets and was also scared of the mouse, the mother added: â€œBut just keep calm, dear child, weâ€™ll soon drive away the nasty mouse. If the traps donâ€™t work, then Fritz will bring his gray cat.â€□

No sooner was Marie alone in the living room than she went over to the glass cabinet and sobbed to Nutcracker: â€œAh, my dear, good Herr Drosselmeier! What can I, a poor, unhappy girl, do for you? I can also give away all my picture books and even my lovely new dress that was given to me by Holy Christ. I can hand over that horrid Mouse King for him to chew me up. But no matter how much I give him, Mouse King will keep asking for more and more until Iâ€™ve got nothing left and he ultimately chews me up instead of you. Oh, I, poor child, just what should I do? Just what should I do?â€□

While grieving and bereaving, little Marie noticed that a large bloodstain was left over from that night, from Nutcracker. Ever since Marie learned that her Nutcracker was actually young Drosselmeierâ€™s nephew, she stopped carrying him on her arm, stopped hugging and kissing the boy. Indeed, she barely touched him because of a certain timidity.

But now, she removed him very cautiously from the shelf and she started rubbing away the bloodstain with her handkerchief. Suddenly, however, she felt that Nutcracker was growing warm in her hand and beginning to stir. She swiftly returned him to his shelf. Her lips shook to and fro and she arduously whispered to Nutcracker.

â€œAh, most worthy Demoiselle Stahlbaum, excellent friend, how much I owe you. No, you wonâ€™t sacrifice any picture book for me, any dress given you by Christ. Just get me a sword, a sword, and Iâ€™ll take care of the rest. May heâ€”â€ Here, Nutcracker lost his power of speech, and his eyes, inspired to express the inmost melancholy, became frozen and lifeless again. Marie experienced no horror. Rather, she hopped for joy since she knew of a method for saving Nutcracker without further painful sacrifices. But where would they get a sword for the boy?

Marie decided to ask Fritz for advice. So in the evening, when their parents had gone out, the two children sat alone in the living room, by the glass cabinet. And here she told her brother everything that had happened to her with Nutcracker and with Mouse King, and why it was necessary to save Nutcracker. Fritz grew more pensive over nothing so much asâ€”according to Marieâ€™s reportâ€”his Hussars had conducted themselves so poorly in the battle. He again asked very earnestly if that was true, and when Marie assured him that it was indeed true, Fritz hurried over to the glass cabinet. There he gave a grandiloquent speech. Then, to punish their selfishness and cowardice, he cut off the ensigns from their caps one by one. Furthermore, he forbade them from blaring the Hussar March for a whole year.

After pronouncing his sentence, Fritz turned back to Marie, saying: â€œAs for a sword, I can help Nutcracker. Yesterday I pensioned off an old colonel of the Cuirassiers. He wonâ€™t be needing his sharp and lovely saber any longer.â€

The colonel consumed the pension allotted to him by Fritz, who kept him in the backmost corner of the third shelf in the cabinet. He was drawn up from there, the decorated silver sword taken off and hung around Nutcracker.

The following night, Marie was still so horrified that she couldnâ€™t fall asleep. Around midnight, it sounded as if a bizarre racket, a roaring and jangling came from the living room. All at once, there was a squeal! â€œMouse King! Mouse King!â€ cried Marie, and, horrified, she jumped out of bed. Everyone remained still. But soon there was a soft, soft tapping on the door, and a very fine voice was heard:

â€œMost esteemed Demoiselle Stahlbaum! You donâ€™t have to worry about opening upâ€”Iâ€™ve got good, cheerful news!â€ Marie recognized the voice of young Drosselmeier. She tossed her little coat on and flung open the door. Little Nutcracker was standing outside, with his bloody sword in his right hand and a wax candle in his left hand. Upon spotting Marie, he knelt down on one knee and said:

â€œYou, oh lady, you alone have steeled me with chivalrous courage and have strengthened my arm in order to fight the boisterous man who has dared to scorn you. The treacherous Mouse King has been defeated and he is now rolling in his own blood! Oh, lady! Do not refuse to accept the signs of victory from the hand of your knight, who is devoted to you even unto death.â€ With these words, little Nutcracker very skillfully tripped off the seven golden crowns of Mouse King, which he had slipped over his left arm. He handed the seven crowns to Marie, who joyfully received them.

Nutcracker stood up and continued speaking:

â€œAh, my dearest Demoiselle Stahlbaum! Having overpowered my enemy, I ask you: What could I do to show you splendid thingsâ€”if you felt enough affection for me to take just a few steps! Oh, do it, do itâ€”my dearest demoiselle.â

€□

The Kingdom of Dolls

I believe that none of you children would have hesitated for even an instant to obey honest and kindhearted Nutcracker, who could never have had anything nasty in mind. As for Marie, she was all the more obedient since she knew how greatly she could rely on Nutcrackerâ€™s gratitude. Indeed, she was convinced that he would keep his word and show her many splendid things.

She therefore said: â€œIâ€™ll go with you, Herr Drosselmeier. But it mustnâ€™t be far or last a long time. You see, I didnâ€™t get enough sleep last night.â€□

â€œThat,â€□ replied Nutcracker, â€œis why Iâ€™m taking the nearest path, although itâ€™s somewhat difficult.â€□

He took the lead, followed by Marie, until he stopped by the huge, old wardrobe in the hallway. Marie was astonished to see that the doors of this closet, normally shut, were now wide open, so that she clearly made out her fatherâ€™s traveling fox fur, which hung in front. Nutcracker very deftly climbed up the ridges and adornments so that he could get hold of the enormous tassel, which, fastened by a thick cord, hung on the back of that fur. When Nutcracker pulled hard on the tassel, a very delicate cedar stairway quickly dropped through the fur sleeve.

â€œPlease go up, dearest demoiselle,â€□ cried Nutcracker.

Marie did so, but scarcely had she gone up through the sleeve, scarcely had she peered out of the collar, than a blinding light shone toward her. All at once, she found herself on a marvelously fragrant meadow, from which millions of sparks arose like blinking gems.

â€œWeâ€™re on the Rock Candy Meadow,â€□ said Nutcracker. â€œBut soon weâ€™ll pass through that gate.â€□

Now, looking up, Marie first noticed the lovely gate just a few steps forward on the meadow. The gate seemed to be made of white, brown, and raisin-colored sprinkled marble. But when Marie drew closer, she saw that the entire mass consisted of baked raisins and sugared almonds. That was why, as Nutcracker assured her, the gate they were passing through was called the Almond and Raisin Gate. Common folk very indecorously nicknamed it the Snack Gate.

In a gallery of this gateway, obviously made of barley sugar, six monkeys in red jerkins were playing the most beautiful Turkish military music. As a result, Marie scarcely noticed that she was progressing farther and farther on multicolored tiles, which, however, were nothing but nicely filled lozenges. Soon the travelers were surrounded by the sweetest perfumes, which poured out of a wondrous grove that opened on both sides. In the dark foliage, the interior glowed and gleamed so brightly that you could see gold and silver fruits hanging on gaudy branches. Stems and stalks had decorated themselves with ribbons and bouquets like merry marital couples and cheerful wedding guests. And when the orange scents billowed like zephyrs, then the twigs and leaves all hummed, and the tinsel flapped and fluttered so thoroughly that it all sounded like jubilant music, which had to accompany the sparkling lights, the hopping and dancing.

â€œAh, how beautiful it all is!â€□ cried Marie, blissful and enraptured.

â€œWeâ€™re in Christmas Forest, my dear demoiselle,â€□ said Nutcracker.

â€œAh,â€□ Marie continued. â€œIf only I could spend a little time hereâ€”oh, itâ€™s far too beautiful!â€□

Nutcracker clapped his little hands, and along came a few small shepherds and shepherdesses, hunters and huntswomen, who were so white and tender that you could have believed them to be pure sugar, that Marie had not yet noticed, even though they had been strolling in the woods. They brought over a favorite gold armchair, placed a white cushion of licorice upon it, and very courteously invited Marie to settle down. No sooner had she done so than shepherds and shepherdesses came and danced a very pretty ballet, whereby the hunters blew their instruments quite decently. But then they all vanished in the bushes.

â€œForgive me,â€□ said Nutcracker, â€œforgive me, dearest Demoiselle Stahlbaum, for doing such a miserable dance. You see, the dancers all came from our marionette ballet, which is controlled by wires, and which can only do the same things over and over again. There are also good reasons why the hunters were so drowsy and feeble in their blowing. The sugar basket does hang at nose level on the Christmas tree, but itâ€™s still too high. Well, why donâ€™t we stroll a bit more?â€□

â€œAh, everything was very lovely, and I really liked it!â€□ said Marie, standing up and following Nutcracker. They walked along a murmuring, sweetly whispering brook, which seemed to be filling the forest with all of its marvelous scents.

â€œThis is Orange Brook,â€□ said Nutcracker when asked. â€œIt has a lovely fragrance, but it doesnâ€™t equal in size or in beauty the Lemonade River, which likewise empties into Lake Almond Milk.â€□

And indeed, Marie soon heard a louder plashing and splashing and she spotted the broad Lemonade River. In proud, cream-colored waves, it rippled away amid green-glowing, garnet-shining shrubs. An exceeding freshness, cooling her breast and her heart, surged up from the stunning water. Not too far from there, the water of a dark yellow creek was being arduously dragged away, spreading utterly sweet perfumes. On the shore, all kinds of very lovely little children sat angling small, thick fish and consuming them right away. Upon coming closer, Marie noticed that these fish looked like hazelnuts.

In the distance, a very pretty hamlet lay on the creek: houses, church, parsonage, barnsâ€”they were all dark brown, but decorated with gold roofs. Furthermore, countless walls were painted so colorfully as if lemon peels and almond kernels were pasted on them.

â€œThatâ€™s Gingerbreadhome,â€□ said Nutcracker. â€œIt lies on Honey River and itâ€™s inhabited by very lovely people. But theyâ€™re mostly grouchy because they suffer terribly from toothaches. Thatâ€™s why weâ€™re not going inside.â€□

At that moment, Marie noticed a pretty little townlet consisting of colorful, transparent cottages. Nutcracker headed straight in that direction, and now Marie heard a wild, joyful uproar. She also saw a thousand sweet little people examining and starting to unpack many crammed wagons standing in the marketplace. But what they produced was gaudy, colored paper and bars of chocolate.

â€œWeâ€™re in Bonbonville,â€□ said Nutcracker. â€œA shipment has just arrived from Paper Land and from Chocolate King. A short while ago, the poor Bonbonvillers were harshly threatened by Mosquito Admiralâ€™s navy. Thatâ€™s why theyâ€™ve covered their homes with the gifts of Paper Land and why theyâ€™re constructing proficient works sent them by Chocolate King. However, dearest Demoiselle Stahlbaum, we donâ€™t plan to visit every last townlet and hamlet of this land. To the capital! To the capital!â€□ Nutcracker rushed forward and Marie, filled with curiosity, brought up the rear.

It wasnâ€™t long before the fragrance of roses wafted up, and everything was surrounded by a gentle, floating shimmer of roses. Marie perceived that this was the image in a rosy red shining creek, which flowed in tiny pink and silver waves, gushing and rushing as if in wondrously beautiful notes and melodies. On this graceful water, which broadened out more and more like a huge lake, marvelous silver white swans with golden neckbands were swimming and vying with one another in singing the loveliest songs. Tiny diamond fish emerged and submerged, as if dancing a merry dance on the floods of roses.

â€œAh!â€□ cried Marie enthusiastically. â€œAh! This is the lake that Godfather Drosselmeier wanted to make for me, truly, and I myself am the girl who will caress the dear little swans.â€□

Nutcracker smirked more scornfully than Marie had ever noticed on him. Then he said: â€œThatâ€™s something that Uncle will never be able to do. You will manage to do so yourself, dear Demoiselle Stahlbaum. But letâ€™s not ponder it too deeply. Instead, letâ€™s cross the Lake of Roses and head for the capital.â€□

The Capital

Nutcracker clapped his tiny hands again, and the Lake of Roses started rushing more and more strongly, the waves splashing higher and higher. Marie noticed a shell-shaped vehicle coming from far away and drawn by two dolphins covered with golden scales. The vehicle was formed by gaudy, sunny, and sparkling jewels. Twelve darling little Moors, wearing caps and loincloths woven out of shiny hummingbird feathers, sprang ashore. They carried first Marie, then Nutcracker, gently gliding over the waves to the vehicle, which then sailed across the lake. Oh, how lovely it was to see Marie in the rolling vehicle, surrounded by the fragrance of roses, flowing around the waves of roses. The two golden dolphins raised their nostrils and spurted crystal rays high in the air; and where the arcs fell flickering and twinkling, it sounded like the crooning of two fine and graceful voices.

â€œWho swims in the rosy lake? For goodnessâ€™ sake! Midges, no bridges! Bmm, bmm, fish! What a dish! Hmm, hmm, swans, where are ponds? Swa, swa, goldbird! Traraâ€”streams, reams, teams, beams! Angels, angels! Sing in wings!â€□

However, the twelve little Moors, who had sprung in back of the chariot, seemed to take the singing of the streams of water amiss. For they shook their parasols so hard that the date leaves they were made of got creased and crumpled! They also stamped their feet to a bizarre beat! â€œClap and clip and clip and clap, to and fro! Moors dance a round, make a sound! Stir, fish, stir, swans. Drone, chariot, drone. Clap and clip and clip and clap, to and fro!â€□

â€œMoors are such merry people,â€□ said Nutcracker, somewhat embarrassed. â€œGoodness, youâ€™ll make the entire lake rebellious!â€□

And indeed, a confusing uproar of wonderful voices exploded. They seemed to swim in the lake and in the air. But Marie ignored them all. Instead, she peered at the waves of fragrant roses, and each wave smiled back at her smiling girlish faceâ€”a graceful and a gracious face.

â€œAh,â€□ cried Marie, joyfully clapping her little hands together. â€œAh! Just look, dear Herr Drosselmeier! Princess Pirlipat is down there, smiling at me so wondrously and graciously. Oh, do look, Herr Drosselmeier!â€□

But Nutcracker sighed almost lamentably and said: â€œOh, dearest Demoiselle Stahlbaum, thatâ€™s not Princess Pirlipatâ€”thatâ€™s you and always you yourself. Thatâ€™s always your own gracious face smiling so dearly out of every billow of roses.â€□

Marie threw back her head, shut her eyes tight, and was very ashamed. That same instant, she was lifted from the chariot by the twelve Moors and carried ashore. She now found herself in a small grove that was almost lovelier than Christmas Forestâ€”since everything in it shone and sparkled. But especially, one could admire the strange fruit that hung from all the treesâ€”fruit that was not only strangely colored but also marvelously fragrant.

â€œWeâ€™re in Jellygrove,â€□ said Nutcracker, â€œand thereâ€™s the capital.â€□

What did Marie catch sight of now? How, you children, will I even start to describe the beauty and splendor of the city that spread out over a rich, flowery pasture before Marieâ€™s very eyes? Not only were the walls and towers resplendent in the most fantastic colors but, in regard to the forms of the houses, there was nothing similar anywhere in the world. For, instead of roofs, the houses had delicately pleated wreaths, and the towers were topped with the finest and most colorful foliage that could be seen.

When they passed through the gates, which looked as if they were built out of macaroons and frosted fruit, silver soldiers presented their rifles, and a manikin in a brocaded robe threw his arms around Nutcracker and said: â€œWelcome, dearest Prince, welcome to Jamburg!â€□

Marie was astonished that young Drosselmeier was addressed as Prince by a noble gentleman. But now she heard so many very fine voices bursting through one another, exulting and laughing for joy, playing and singing, that she couldnâ€™t think of anything else. Instead, she asked little Nutcracker just what it all meant.

â€œOh, dearest Demoiselle Stahlbaum,â€□ replied Nutcracker, â€œitâ€™s nothing unusual. Jamburg is a merry, populous city, every day is like this. But letâ€™s keep going, please.â€□

No sooner had they walked a few paces than they reached the great marketplace, which offered the most thrilling view. The surrounding houses were shuttered by sweets, gallery was piled on gallery; and at the middle there stood a high, frosted layer cake as the obelisk. All about it, four very artful fountains spewed orgeat, lemonade, and other superb sweet drinks aloft. And the basin filled up with cream, which could have been spooned out right away.

But lovelier than anyone else were the little people. Thousands of them crowded through, head by head, exulting and laughing and joking and singing. In short: they raised the merry uproar that Marie had already heard far away. There were elegant ladies and gentlemen, Greeks and Armenians, Jews and Tyroleans, officers and soldiers and preachers and shepherds and buffoonsâ€”in short: every kind of person to be found in the entire world.

In one corner the tumult increased, the crowd streamed apart. Then the Grand Mogul was carried across on a palanquin, escorted by ninety-three grandees and seven hundred slaves. But what happened was that in the other corner, the fish guild, some five hundred heads strong, was holding its parade. And it was also dreadful that the Turkish Grandee had the idea of riding across the marketplace with three thousand Janissaries followed by the huge pageant of the opera ***The Interrupted Sacrificial Feast***â€”just as the crowd charged toward the layer cake, singing and beating their drums: â€œUp! Thank the powerful sun!â€□ What pushing and shoving and driving and squealing! Soon there was also a lot of

yammering! For a fisherman had lopped off a Brahmanâ€™s head in the mob, and the Grand Mogul was nearly run over by a buffoon.

The racket grew wilder and wilder, and the participants were already starting to lunge into one another and beat one another, when the man in the brocade robe climbed up the layer cake. This was the man who had greeted Nutcracker as Prince. Now, after a very dazzling bell was pealed three times, he cried aloud three times: â€œConfectioner! Confectioner! Confetioner!â€

The tumult promptly faded, and each man tried to help himself as best he could. After the entanglements were untangled, the filthy Grand Mogul was cleaned and brushed, and the Brahmanâ€™s head was put back on again. And now the merry clamor resumed.

â€œWhatâ€™s all this about the Confectioner, my good Herr Drosselmeier?â€ asked Marie.

â€œMy dearest Demoiselle Stahlbaum,â€ replied Nutcracker. â€œâ€˜Confectionerâ€™ is our name for an unknown but very ghastly power that we believe can do whatever we like to a human being. It is the doom hanging over this small, cheerful nation. And this little nation is so frightened that the mere mention of its name can silence the loudest tumult, as was just proved by the mayor. Each man then stops thinking about earthly matters, about pokes in the ribs and bumps on the head. Instead, he draws into himself and says: â€˜What is man and what can become of him?â€™â€

Marie couldnâ€™t help crying out in loud admiration, nay, supreme amazement. She was suddenly standing in front of a rose red brightly shimmering castle with a hundred airy turrets. But now and again, rich bouquets of violets, narcissi, tulips, and gillyflowers were scattered on the walls; and the dark, burning colors simply dazzled as they heightened the rosy tint against the white ground. The vast dome of the central building as well as the pyramid-shaped roofs of the turrets were strewn with a thousand gold and silver twinkling stars. â€œNow weâ€™re outside the Marzipan Castle,â€ said Nutcracker.

Marie was totally absorbed in viewing the enchanted palace, but it did not escape her that the roof of one huge tower was completely missing. Small manikins, perching on a scaffold of cinnamon sticks, appeared intent on restoring the rooftop. Before managing to ask Nutcracker about it, he continued:

â€œA short while ago, this beautiful castle was threatened with destruction if not total devastation. Sweet-Tooth the Giant came along, quickly bit off that roof, and was already gnawing on the huge dome. However, the Jamburgers brought him an entire city district plus a considerable section and a confect grove as a tribute, which he fed on and then went his way.â€

At that same moment, a very gentle and pleasant music could be heard, the gates of the castle opened up, and twelve little pageboys came out, holding clove stems like torches in their little hands. A pageâ€™s head consisted of a pearl, his body of rubies and emeralds, and they walked about on little feet beautifully worked in pure gold. They were followed by four ladies almost as big as Marieâ€™s ClÃ¤rchen, but so elegantly shining and splendid that Marie could not mistake the born princesses in them for even an instant. She embraced Nutcracker tenderly and exclaimed with mournful joy:

â€œOh, my prince! My dearest prince! Oh, my brother!â€

Nutcracker seemed deeply moved. He wiped the dense tears from his eyes, took hold of Marieâ€™s hand, and spoke grandiloquently:

â€œThis is Demoiselle Stahlbaum, the daughter of a very highly appreciated medical counselor and the savior of my life. If she hadnâ€™t hurled the slipper at

the right time, if she hadnâ€™t gotten me the sword of the retired lieutenant, then Iâ€™d be lying in the grave, all chewed up by that accursed Mouse King!

â€œOh! That Demoiselle Stahlbaum! Does she equal Pirlipat in beauty, kindness, and virtue, even though she is a born princess? No, I tell you, no!â€

And all the ladies cried: â€œNo!â€ And they hugged Marie and they sobbed: â€œOh, you savior of the beloved princely brotherâ€”excellent Demoiselle Stahlbaum!â€

Now the ladies escorted Marie and Nutcracker into the interior of the castle, a vast space whose walls consisted of colorfully sparkling crystals. But what Marie liked best of all were the darling little chairs, tables, dressers, secretaries, which stood around. They were made of cedar and brazilwood with golden blossoms scattered upon them. The princesses urged Marie and Nutcracker to have a seat, and they themselves would prepare a meal! They pulled out a lot of little pots and bowls made of the finest Japanese porcelainâ€”and knives and spoons and forks and grates and casseroles, and other kitchen appliances of gold and silver. Then they brought the loveliest fruits and sweets, such as Marie had never seen before, and then they tenderly squeezed the fruits with their tiny white hands, pounded the spices, and grated the sugar almonds. In short, they knew their way around a kitchen. And the princesses could see that they were preparing a delicious meal.

While vividly feeling that they likewise understood such things, Marie secretly desired that she could be actively present at the activities of the princesses. As if she had read his mind, Nutcrackerâ€™s most beautiful sister handed Marie a small gold mortar, saying: â€œOh, sweet friend, dearest savior of my brother, grind me a wee bit from this rock candy!â€ Marie pounded away so cheerfully that the mortar resounded, graceful and charming, like a lovely tune.

Nutcracker started telling his taleâ€”indeed, sprawling and rambling. He told about the gruesome battle between his army and Mouse Kingâ€™s army, about his losing due to the cowardice of his troops. Nutcracker also told about how the repulsive Mouse King wanted to chew him to bits; and Marie therefore had to sacrifice a few of the subjects in her service.

During this narrative, Marie felt as if her words, nay, her pestle strokes were moving farther away, growing hazier and hazier. Soon, rising like flimsy clouds of mist, Marie watched the silvery gauzes, in which the princesses, the pageboys, and Nutcracker swam. They could hear a bizarre singing and whirring and whizzing, which vanished in the distance. And now Marie wanted to ascend as if surging on billows, higher and higher, higher and higher, higher and higher.

Conclusion

â€œPrr! Puff!â€ resounded. Marie plunged down from an immeasurable height. Now ***that*** was a jolt! She opened her eyes and found herself lying in her little bed. It was broad daylight, and her mother stood in front of her, saying: â€œHow can anyone sleep so long? Breakfast has been ready for quite a while.â€

Highly esteemed audience! You do notice that Marie, utterly dazed by all the wonders she had seen, had finally dozed off in the vast hall of Marzipan Castle. Next, she had been carried home and put to bed by the Moors or the pages or even the princesses themselves.

â€œOh, Mother, dear Mother! Where did the young Herr Drosselmeier take me to last night, and what gorgeous things did I see?!â€ Now Marie told me

everything almost as precisely as I just did. And [Mother] gaped at her in amazement.

When Marie was finished, Mother said: â€œYouâ€™ve had a very long and very lovely dream, dear Marie. But now youâ€™ve simply got to dismiss all such thoughts from your mind.â€

However, Marie obstinately insisted that she hadnâ€™t been dreaming, that she had really seen all those things. Mother then led her to the glass cabinet, took out Nutcracker from his usual place on the third shelf, and said: â€œYou silly girl! How can you truly believe that this wooden Nuremberg doll can have life and motion?â€

â€œBut Mother dear!â€ Marie broke in. â€œI do know that little Nutcracker is young Herr Drosselmeierâ€™s nephew from Nuremberg!â€

Both parents burst into noisy laughter.

â€œAh,â€ Marie went on almost tearfully. â€œNow youâ€™re actually making fun of my Nutcracker, Father dear, even though he spoke so highly of you. For when we arrived at Marzipan Castle, and Nutcracker introduced me to his sisters, the princesses, he said that you were a very respectable medical counselor!â€

This time, the laughter, which now emerged from Luise and even Fritz, was all the more vociferous. So Marie ran into the next room, quickly reached into her small casket, produced the seven crowns of Mouse King, and handed them to her mother, saying: â€œJust look, Mother dear! These are Mouse Kingâ€™s seven crowns, which young Herr Drosselmeier gave me last night as a sign of his victory! â€

The astonished mother viewed the tiny crowns. They were worked so cleanly from a totally unfamiliar, but intensely sparkling metal that they couldnâ€™t have been wrought by human hands. Nor could the medical counselor see his fill of the little crowns. And both Father and Mother deeply urged Marie to reveal where she had obtained the crowns. But she could only stick to what she had said.

When her father started treating her severely, even scolding her and calling her a little liar, Marie burst into tears and lamented: â€œAh, poor child that I am, poor child! What should I say now?â€

At that moment, the door flew open. The Supreme Court counselor came in and exclaimed: â€œWhatâ€™s this? Whatâ€™s this? My dear little child weeping and sobbing? Whatâ€™s this? Whatâ€™s this?â€

The medical counselor informed him about everything that had happened, and he showed him the little crowns. But no sooner had he seen the crowns than he laughed and said: â€œEmpty twaddle! Empty twaddle! Why those are the little crowns I wore on my watch chain years ago! I gave them to little Marie on her second birthday! Have you all forgotten?â€

Neither the medical counselor nor his wife could remember. But when Marie saw that the faces of her parents had grown friendly again, she sprang upon Godfather Drosselmeier and exclaimed: â€œAh! You know everything, Godfather! Just tell them that my Nutcracker is your nephew, the young Herr Drosselmeier from Nuremberg, and that he gave me the crowns.â€

But the Supreme Court counselor scowled and muttered: â€œSilly, mindless twaddle.â€

Thereupon, the medical counselor took little Marie before him and spoke very earnestly: â€œListen, Marie. Forget about your antics and your fantasies! If you ever repeat that the deformed and simpleminded Nutcracker is the nephew of Herr Supreme Court Counselor, Iâ€™ll hurl all your dolls out the windowâ€”not only

Nutcracker but all your others, including Mamsell Clarchen!â€□

Now poor Marie could no longer talk about what her mind was filled with. For you can certainly imagine that Marieâ€™s lovely and splendid experiences were unforgettable. Even my highly esteemed reader or listener Fritzâ€”even her comrade Fritz Stahlbaum turned his back on his sister when she tried to tell him about the miraculous realms where she was so happy. At times, supposedly, he had even muttered between his teeth: â€œSilly goose!â€□

Still, I canâ€™t believe he really said that, given his tried and tested disposition. This much, however, is certain: Since Fritz no longer believed what Marie told him, he virtually apologized to his Hussars in public review; apologized for the injustice he had made them suffer. Instead of the lost ensigns, far higher and lovelier bushes of goose quills decorated them and again permitted them to blast the Hussar March. Well, we know best about the courage of the Hussars, when they got spots from their ugly dumplings on their red jerkins!

Though Marie was not allowed to talk about her adventures, the images of that wondrous fairyland hovered around her in sweetly rushing billows and gracious, charming sounds. She looked at everything once more, focusing sharply. And so, in lieu of playing as usual, she sat there, quiet and rigid and deeply self-absorbed. That is why everyone scolded her for being a little â€œdreamer.â€□

Now one day, the Supreme Court counselor was repairing a clock in the medical counselorâ€™s home. Marie was sitting by the glass cabinet, deep in her dreams, and peering at Nutcracker. All at once, she blurted out: â€œAh! Dear Herr Drosselmeier! If you were truly alive, I wouldnâ€™t treat you like Princess Pirlipat, scorning you because, for my sake, you stopped being a handsome young man!â€□

At that moment, the Supreme Court counselor yelled: â€œHey! Hey! Empty twaddle!â€□ At that instant, there was such a whack and boom that Marie fainted and sank from her chair.

When she awoke, her mother was busily attending to her and she said: â€œHow can you fall from the chairâ€”such a big girl! The nephew of the Supreme Court counselor has just arrived from Nuremberg. Be a good girl!â€□

Marie looked up. The Supreme Court counselor had put his glass periwig back on, slipped into his yellow jacket, and smiled in great satisfaction. His hand clutched a small, but very well-built young man, while his little face had a peaches-and-cream complexion. He wore a splendid red coat with a gilt lining, white silk shoes and stockings, and a darling bouquet in his jabot. He was also nicely groomed and powdered, and a wonderful queue hung down his back. The little sword on his side glittered as if thoroughly encrusted with jewels, and the cap he held under his arm seemed woven out of silk flocks.

The young manâ€™s pleasant habits were demonstrated immediately by the many gorgeous toys he had brought for Marie. He also offered her the most delectable marzipan and the same figurines that Mouse King had chewed up, whereby the young man had also gotten Fritz a magnificent saber.

During the meal, the well-behaved young man cracked nuts for the entire company. Not even the hardest shells could resist him. With his right hand, he inserted the nuts into his mouth; and with his left hand, he pulled his queueâ€”crack! The nut fell into pieces!

Marie had turned bright red upon seeing the well-behaved young man. And she turned even redder after the meal, when young Drosselmeier invited her to join him at the glass cabinet in the living room.

â€œPlay nicely with one another, children,â€□ the Supreme Court counselor exclaimed. â€œI donâ€™t mind playing now that all my clocks run correctly.â€□

But no sooner was young Drosselmeier alone with Marie than he knelt down on one knee and said:

â€œOh, my highly esteemed Demoiselle Stahlbaum! See at your feet your happy Drosselmeier, whose life you saved on this very spot! You were kind enough to state that if I grew ugly for your sake, you would not scorn me like that wretched Princess Pirlipat. I promptly stopped being a despicable Nutcracker and I regained my earlier, not unpleasant looks. Oh, highly esteemed Demoiselle! Delight me with your worthy hand. Share crown and kingdom with me, rule from Marzipan Castle with me, for I am now king there.â€□

Marie lifted up the youth and said quietly:

â€œDear Herr Drosselmeier! You are a kind and gentle person! And since you also rule a graceful land with very cheerful and attractive people, I will accept you as my fiancÃ©!â€□ Marie hereby became Drosselmeierâ€™s fiancÃ©e.

A year later, we are told, he called for her in a golden carriage drawn by silver horses. Twenty-two thousand of the most brilliant figurines danced amid their adornments of pearls and diamonds.

Marie supposedly is still queen of a land where you can see sparkling Christmas Forests everywhere as well as translucent Marzipan Castlesâ€”in short, the most splendid and most wondrous things, if you only have the right eyes to see them with.

And that was the tale of Nutcracker and Mouse King.

The Tale of the Nutcracker

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

Preface

Which explains how the author was obliged to tell the tale of Nutcracker of Nuremberg.

There was a large party for children at the home of my friend, Count Mâ€”â€”, and I, for my part, had contributed to the noisy and joyful festivities by bringing my daughter. Within half an hour, I had paternally taken part in four or five successive matches of blindmanâ€™s buff, hot cockles, and dressing up in fancy garb. My head was a bit shattered by the racket produced by some twenty charming demons eight to ten years old and vying with one another in making the most noise. I therefore slipped away from the salon and went looking for a certain boudoir I was acquainted with. This place was quite soundproof and withdrawn, and I counted on very gently picking up the thread of my interrupted thoughts.

I had worked my retreat so skillfully that, luckily, I abandoned not only the eyes of the young guestsâ€”which was not very difficult, given their intense focus on their games. However, I had also discarded their parents, which was quite a different matter altogether.

I had reached the boudoir I was seeking, and I had stepped inside, whereupon I noticed that it had been transformed temporarily into a refectory, piled high with gigantic buffets laden with pastries and refreshments.

Now these gastronomic preparations were a further guarantee that I would not be disturbed before supper, since the above-mentioned boudoir was reserved for snacks.

I spotted an enormous Voltaire chair, with a high padded back, a low seat, and round armsâ€”veritable Louis XV. It was a lazybones, as they say in Italy, that land of true lazybones, and I adjusted voluptuously, delighted as I was by the thought of spending a whole hour all alone with my thoughts. Indeed, my thoughts were so very precious in the midst of this whirlwind, into which we public vassals are incessantly drawn.

So whether it was fatigue or lack of habit or the result of a rare well-beingâ€”within ten minutes I was fast asleep.

I donâ€™t know how long I was unaware of what was happening around me when I was suddenly yanked from my slumber by noisy bursts of laughter. Now I opened my big, haggard eyes that saw nothing overhead but a lovely Boucher ceiling scattered with doves and cupids. I tried to get up but my efforts were fruitless. I was attached to my easy chair no less solidly than Gulliver to the Lilliputian shore. I promptly grasped the drawback of my position: I had been caught off guard in enemy territory and I was now a prisoner of war. The best thing for me to do in my situation was to bravely resign myself to my fate and to negotiate my freedom amicably.

My first proposal was to take the victors to Felix tomorrow and to put his entire boutique at their disposition. Unfortunately, it was the wrong time. I was speaking to an audience who was listening to me with mouths stuffed full of babas and hands crammed full of patties.

So my proposal was shamefully rejected.

I offered to gather the whole honorable company tomorrow, in a garden of their choosing, and to let off fireworks composed of many pinwheels and Roman candles as fixed by the spectators themselves.

This offer was successful among the little boys, but vehemently opposed by the little girls, who declared that they were horribly scared of fireworks: Their nerves couldnâ€™t stand the banging of the crackers, and the stench of the powder greatly upset them.

I was about to try a third proposal when I heard a gentle, melodious voice that glided softly into the ears of my companions. Their words made me shudder:

â€œHave Papa tell us a lovely taleâ€”heâ€™s making a fuss!â€

I wanted to protest, but at that very instant my voice was drowned out by these shouts:

â€œAh! Yes! A tale! A lovely tale! We want a tale!â€

â€œBut, children,â€ I cried with all my strength. â€œYouâ€™re asking me for the most difficult thing in the world! A tale! What are you doing? Ask me for the ***Iliad.*** Ask me for the ***Aeneid.*** Ask me for ***Jerusalem Delivered***, and Iâ€™ll manage! But a tale, a fairy tale! Damn it! Perrault is a very different man from Homer, from Virgil, and from Torquato Tasso. And ***Tom Thumb*** is a very different original creation from Achilles, Turnus, or Renaud!â€

â€œWe donâ€™t want a verse epic,â€ the children yelled unanimously. â€œWe want a tale!â€

â€œMy dear children, ifâ€”â€

â€œThereâ€™s no â€˜if.â€™ We want a tale!â€

â€œBut my little friendsâ€”â€

â€œThere is no â€˜but.â€™ We want a tale! We want a tale! We want a tale!â€ All these voices chorused in a tone that brooked no reply.

â€œVery well then,â€ I sighed. â€œLetâ€™s have a tale!â€

â€œAh! Thatâ€™s wonderful!â€ said my persecutors.

â€œBut I have to warn you about one thing. The tale Iâ€™m going to tell you is not by me!â€

â€œWho cares, so along as itâ€™s entertaining!â€

I admit I was a bit humiliated by the audienceâ€™s lack of interest in an original work.

â€œAnd so who is the author of the tale, mein Herr?â€ asked a melodious voice, belonging, no doubt, to a setup more curious than the others.

â€œThe author is E. T. A. Hoffmann, mademoiselle. Do you know Herr Hoffmann?â€

â€œNo, mein Herr, I donâ€™t know him.â€

â€œAnd what is the title of your tale?â€ This question was asked in a hearty tone by someone who senses he has the right to question the son of the master of the house.

â€œâ€˜Nutcracker of Nuremberg,â€™â€ I replied in all humility. â€œDo you care for the title, my dear Henry?â€

â€œHmm! That title is not very promising. But so whatâ€”it can still work! If you bore us, Iâ€™ll stop you, and youâ€™ll try another title, and so on, I warn you, until we find a title that amuses us.â€

â€œOne moment, one moment! I refuse to accept that commitment. I could take it only if you were important people!â€□

â€œStill, those are our conditions. Otherwise youâ€™ll be a prisoner in perpetuity.â€□

â€œMy dear Henry, you are a charming child, a wonderful pupil, and Iâ€™ll be amazed if you donâ€™t grow up to become a very distinguished statesman someday! Untie me, and Iâ€™ll do anything you like!â€□

â€œWord of honor?â€□

â€œWord of honor!â€□

At that moment, I felt the thousand bonds loosening. Everyone had lent a hand for my release, and within thirty seconds my freedom was restored.

Now since one must keep oneâ€™s word, even when given to a child, I invited my listeners to make themselves comfortable so that they might listen painlessly from listening to slumber. And once each listener was ready, I began.

The Tale of the Nutcracker

Godfather Drosselmayer

Once, in the town of Nuremberg, there lived a highly esteemed presiding judge known as Presiding Judge Silberhaus, which means Silver House.

This judge had a boy and a girl.

The boy, nine years old, was called Fritz.

The girl, seven and a half years old, was called Marie.

They were two lovely children, but so different in face and character that no one would ever have believed them to be brother and sister.

Fritz was a big boy, chubby, blustering, mischievous, stamping his foot at the slightest annoyance. He was convinced that everything in the world was created for his entertainment, and he stuck to his guns until the doctor, intolerant of his cries and tears, his stamping foot, emerged from his office! Raising the forefinger of his right hand to the level of his brow, the doctor merely said: â€œHerr Fritz!â€□

The boy was then taken with an enormous desire to sink into the ground.

As for the mother: Needless to say, no matter how high she lifted her finger or even her hand, Fritz totally ignored her.

His sister, Marie, by contrast, was a frail and pallid child with long curly hair, of course, and falling on her narrow white shoulders like a sheaf of moveable and radiant gold on an alabaster vase. Marie was modest, gentle, affable, and merciful toward all sufferings, even those of dolls. She obeyed the slightest signal of her mother, and she never talked back even to her governess, Mademoiselle Trudchen. As a result, Marie was adored by everyone.

Meanwhile, December 24 of the year 17â€”â€”had arrived. You are not unaware, my little friends, that December 24 is Christmas Eveâ€”that is, the eve of the day when the Infant Jesus was born in a manger between a donkey and a cow. Now Iâ€™m going to explain something to you. Even the most ignorant among you have heard that each country has its own customsâ€”isnâ€™t that so? And the most educated among you know, without a doubt, that Nuremberg is a German city famous for its toys, its dolls, and its Punchinellos. Indeed, it sends caseloads of these wondrous things all over the world, so that the children of Nuremberg must

be the happiest on earthâ€”unless they are like the inhabitants of Ostende, who have oysters only to watch them pass.

Hence, Germany, being a different country from France, has different habits from France. Among the French, the first day of the year is the day of gift giving, so that many people strongly wish that the year began on January 2. In Germany, however, the day of gift giving is December 24â€”that is, Christmas Eve. Furthermore, gifts are exchanged in a very particular fashion on the other side of the Rhine. You see, a large tree is placed in the salon. The tree stands in the middle of a table, and the toys to be given to the children are hung from all the branches. If a toy is too heavy for the tree, it is put on the table. Then the children are told that it is dear little Jesus who sends them their share of the presents He has received from the Three Magi. Now this is only a little white lie, for, as you know, all the good things of this world come from Jesus.

I donâ€™t need to tell you that among the favored children of Nurembergâ€”that is, among those who received the most Christmas toys of all kindsâ€”were the children of Judge Silberhaus. For, aside from their parents, who adored them, they also had a godfather who adored them, and whom they called Godfather Drosselmayer.

I ought to sketch a portrait of this illustrious personage, whose place in the city of Nuremberg was almost as distinguished as that of Judge Silberhaus. Godfather Drosselmayer, a medical counselor, was anything but handsome. He was gaunt, five feet eight inches tall, and quite stooped, so that if he dropped his handkerchief, he could scarcely bend down to pick it up despite his long legs. His face was as wrinkled as a rennet that has suffered an April frost. In lieu of his right eye he wore a big, black patch. He was totally bald, a disadvantage he countered by wearing a grassy, curly periwigâ€”a highly ingenious device of his own composition made of spun glass. In regard to this respectable headgear, he was forced to keep his hat under his arm nonstop. His remaining eye was alive and brilliant. It seemed to perform not only its own tasks but also those of its missing comrades, for it rolled swiftly about a room of which Godfather Drosselmayer desired to capture all the details in one swoop, or else to focus sharply on people of whom he wished to plumb their deepest thoughts.

Now Godfather Drosselmayer was, as I have said, a medical counselor. And instead of dealing, like most of his colleagues, with the killing of living people correctly and according to rules, he occupied himself exclusively with restoring life to dead things. That is to say: by studying the bodies of humans and animals, he got to know all the ins and outs of machines. As a result, he constructed men who walked, men who saluted, men who presented arms, ladies who danced, who played the harpsichord, the harp, and the viola; dogs that ran, that fetched, that barked; birds that flew, that saluted, that hopped and sang; fish that swam and that ate.

In the end, Godfather did manage to get dolls and Punchinellos to utter a few uncomplicated wordsâ€”such as â€œPapa,â€ â€œMama,â€ â€œDaddy.â€ However, they were spoken in a shrill, repetitive voice, which saddened you because you sensed that everything resulted from a self-acting scheme. And, all in all, an automatic combination is never anything but a parody of the masterpieces of the Lord.

Still, despite all these fruitless exertions, Godfather Drosselmayer never despaired. He stated firmly that he would invent real men, real women, real dogs, real birds, and real fish. Needless to say, his two godchildren, to whom he had promised his first triumphs in this matter, were eagerly looking forward to that day.

We must realize that, having reached this degree of science in mechanics, Godfather Drosselmayer was a valuable man for his friends. If a clock fell ill in the home of Judge Silberhaus, and despite the care taken by normal clockmakers, its hands stopped marking the time and its ticktock broke off, as did its gears.

They sent for Godfather Drosselmayer, who came running, for he was an artist in love with his art. He was taken to the sick clock, which he promptly opened and inserted between his knees. Next, flicking his tongue from the corner of his mouth, his single eye flashing, his glass periwig on the floor, he produced a hoard of small, nameless instruments from his pockets. He had invented them himself, and he alone knew how to employ them. He usually picked the sharpest instruments, thrusting them into the interior of the clock. This acupuncture profoundly offended little Marie, who couldnâ€™t believe that the poor clock didnâ€™t suffer from these operations. Quite the opposite: The clock resuscitated from the gentle trepanation. And once it returned to Marieâ€™s casket, or between her columns, or to her rock, it began to live, beat, and purr for all it was worth. This instantly restored its existence to the apartment, which seemed to have lost its soul in losing its joyful guest.

Moreover, little Marie had painfully watched the kitchen dog turning the spitâ €”an exhausting occupation for the poor animal. At the little girlâ€™s request, Godfather Drosselmayer had agreed to descend from the heights of science to fabricate a canine automaton, who was now turning the spit with no pain and no greed. Meanwhile, Turc, performing the same task heâ€™d been performing during these past three years, had become very chilly. He now warmed his muzzle and his paws, and, truly of independent means, he had nothing more to do than watch his successor. Once mounted, this replacement could devote an hour to his gastronomic chore, ignored by just about everyone else.

Thus, after the judge, after his wife, after Fritz, and after Marie, Turc was certainly that household member who most loved and venerated Godfather Drosselmayer. Whenever he sensed that the godfather was approaching, Turc put on a big show, whereby his joyful barking and his wagging tail announced that the medical counselor was arriving. So Turc proclaimed his coming before the worthy godfather had even touched the knocker on the door.

Hence, on that blessed Christmas Eve, twilight was beginning to settle in. All day long, Fritz and Marie had been barred from entering the grand salon, and now they huddled in a small corner of the dining room. Mademoiselle Trudchen, their governess, was knitting by the window, trying to catch the final beams of the sun. The children were imbued with a vague fear because, according to the custom of that solemn day, no one had brought them any light. As a result, they spoke softly, the way you whisper when youâ€™re a bit scared.

â€œBrother,â€ said Marie, â€œPapa and Mama are certainly taking care of our Christmas tree. Since morning, thereâ€™s been a racket in the salon, which weâ€™re not allowed to enter.â€

â€œListen,â€ said Fritz. â€œSome ten minutes ago, I could tell by Turcâ€™s barking that Godfather Drosselmayer was coming in.â€

â€œOh, goodness!â€ cried Marie, clapping her two little hands together. â €œWhat is our dear godfather going to bring us? Iâ€™m sure it will be some beautiful park filled with trees and with a lovely river flowing across a flowery meadow. Thereâ€™ll be silver swans with golden collars floating on the river, and a girl will bring them marzipans, which theyâ€™ll eat all the way up her aprons.â €

â€œFirst of all,â€□ said Fritz in the pedagogical tone that was peculiar to him, and that his parents rebuked him for as one of his worst faults, â€œyou should know, Mademoiselle Marie, that swans donâ€™t eat marzipans!â€□

â€œI didnâ€™t think they did! But since youâ€™re eighteen months older than I, you must know more about such things than I do!â€□

Fritz put on airs.

â€œThen,â€□ he replied, â€œI believe I can say that if Godfather Drosselmayer does bring us anything, itâ€™ll be a fortress, with soldiers to guard it, cannons to defend it, and enemies to attack it! The combat will be superb!â€□

â€œI donâ€™t like battles,â€□ said Marie. â€œIf he does bring us a fortress, as you put it, it will be for you. Only I demand the wounded so I can treat them.â€□

â€œWhatever he brings,â€□ said Fritz, â€œyou know very well that it wonâ€™t be for you or for me. On the pretext that Godfather Drosselmayerâ€™s gifts are real masterpieces, theyâ€™ll be taken back as soon as they are given to us. Then theyâ€™ll be locked away on the top shelf of the glass cabinet, which only Papa can reach and only if he climbs on a chair. As a result,â€□ Fritz went on, â€œI love the toys that Papa and Mama give usâ€”I love them just as much as I love Godfatherâ€™s presents and even more. And weâ€™re allowed to play with our parentsâ€™ gifts until they fall to pieces.â€□

â€œI love them too!â€□ Marie replied. â€œOnly we mustnâ€™t repeat any of these things to Godfather Drosselmayer.â€□

â€œWhy not?â€□

â€œHeâ€™d be deeply hurt if he saw that we loved our parentsâ€™ gifts more than his. When he brings them, he intends to give us great pleasure. And we have to let him believe that heâ€™s not mistaken.â€□

â€œBah!â€□ said Fritz.

â€œMademoiselle Marie is right, Monsieur Fritz,â€□ said Mademoiselle Trudchen, who normally held her tongue and spoke only under very important circumstances.

â€œCome on,â€□ said Marie brightly in order to keep Fritz from talking back to the poor governess. â€œCome on! Letâ€™s guess what our parents will give us. On condition that she wonâ€™t scold her, I confided in Mama about my doll, Mademoiselle Rose. I explained that she was growing clumsier and clumsier despite my endless sermons. Her sole occupation was to tumble on her noseâ€”an accident that always left highly distasteful marks on her features. Since her face now clashed with her frocks, there was no possibility of taking her out into the world.â€□

â€œWell,â€□ said Fritz, â€œI donâ€™t let Papa ignore the fact that a vigorous chestnut horse would fit nicely in my stable. I also asked him to observe that no well-organized army can exist without a light cavalry, and that the division under my command can be completed only by a squadron of Hussars.â€□

Upon hearing these words, Mademoiselle Trudchen felt that this was the right moment to speak up again.

â€œMonsieur Fritz and Mademoiselle Marie,â€□ she said. â€œYou know perfectly well that it is the Infant Jesus who gives and blesses all these lovely toys that you receive. So do not designate in advance the toys you desire, for Jesus knows better than you yourselves the toys you can find agreeable.â€□

â€œOh, yes!â€□ said Fritz. â€œLast year He gave me only the infantry, while, as Iâ€™ve just told you, I would have found a squadron of Hussars very enjoyable.â€□

â€œI can only thank Him,â€□ said Marie. â€œAll I asked for was a single doll and I also received a pretty white dove with a rosy beak and rosy feet.â€□

At this juncture, the night had settled in fully. The children spoke more and more softly and huddled closer and closer together. They felt surrounded by the beating wings of their joyous guardian angels and they heard a distant sweet and melodious music like the music of an organ that has chanted the Nativity of Our Lord under the somber arches of a cathedral. That same moment, a vivid light swept across the wall, and the children understood that it was the mark of the Infant Jesus. After leaving their playthings in the salon, he was flying on a golden cloud, soaring toward the homes of other children, who looked forward just as eagerly to his visit.

A bell rang promptly, the door banged open, and the house was filled with a light so powerful that the children had only enough strength to exclaim: â€œAh! Ah! Ah!â€□

The parents then went over to the threshold and took Fritz and Marie by the hand.

â€œCome and see, my little friends,â€□ they said, â€œwhat the Infant Jesus has brought you.â€□

The children stepped into the salon, followed by Mademoiselle Trudchen, who had put her knitting on the chair in front of her.

The Christmas Tree

My dear children, itâ€™s not that you donâ€™t know Susse and Giroux, those great entrepreneurs of the happiness of youth. After all, you were conducted into their splendid boutiques and you were told upon opening an infinite credit: â€œCome, take, pick!â€□

Next you halted. You were panting, your eyes were gaping, your mouth was gawking. And you had one of those moments of ecstasy that you will never have againâ€”even on the day that you are named a member of the French Academy, or French peer, or French deputy.

And thatâ€™s what happened to Fritz and Marie when they entered the salon and saw the Christmas tree, which seemed to emerge from the large table covered by a white tablecloth. The table was fully laden not only with gold apples but also with sugar blossoms instead of natural flowers, and with pralines and sugar almonds instead of fruit. The entire scene was shining with the flames of a hundred candles hidden in the foliage, which rendered it as dazzling as those colossal illumination frames that you see on public holidays. At this point, Fritz executed several entrechats, doing honor to his dancing teacher Monsieur Pochette. Marie, however, didnâ€™t even try to hold back two thick tears of joy, which, similar to liquid pearls, rolled down her beaming face as if down a May rose.

Things got worse when they passed from the whole to the details, and the two children saw the table piled high with all kinds of toys. Marie found a doll twice the size of Mademoiselle Rose with a snug and charming silk gown suspended from a coat peg. It hung in such a way that Marie could see it from all around the salon. And Fritz discovered something else on the table: a squadron of Hussars wearing red pelisses with gold piping and mounted on white steeds. The famous chestnut, which left a huge gap in all stables, was attached to the foot of the same table. Thus the new Alexander the Great instantly got astride the brilliant Bucephalus, which

had been offered to him, bridle and saddle.

After galloping around the Christmas tree several times, Fritz declared, upon stepping down on the floor, that even though it was a very wild and stubborn creature, he was certain he could tame it, so that within a month it would be as mild as a lamb.

However, the moment he set foot on the ground, Marie baptized her new doll Mademoiselle Clarchen. This corresponds to the name Claire in French just as Roschen corresponds to Rose. Now the silvery tinkle of the bell could be heard again. The children returned to the source of that soundâ€”that is to say, a corner of the salon.

Now they saw something they had ignored before, fascinated as they had been by the dazzling Christmas tree, which occupied the exact center of the space. You see, this corner had been cut off by a screen, from behind which you could catch a certain noise and a certain music. These sounds proved that something new and alien was taking place in this section of the home. The children realized in unison that they hadnâ€™t yet seen the medical counselor and so they cried out in a single chorus: â€œAh! Godfather Drosselmayer!â€

At these words, as if awaiting only this exclamation to make its movement, the screen collapsed, revealing not only the godfather but a lot more!

In the middle of a green pasture spangled with flowers looms a magnificent castle with a quantity of glass windows on its facades and two gorgeous golden towers on its wings. That same moment, a ringing could be heard from the interior, doors and windows opened, and in the apartments lit by half-inch candles, you could see little gentlemen and little ladies strolling about in marvelous attire. The men wore magnificently embroidered coats as well as silk jackets and culottes, a sword at one side and a hat under an arm. The women were grandly attired in brocaded gowns with wide hoops, their hairdos in straight roots, their hands clutching fans, cooling their faces as if overwhelmed by the heat. In the middle salon, which looked all ablaze because of a crystal luster brimming with tapers, a throng of children was dancing to that ringing: boys in round jackets, girls in short gowns.

At that same time, a gentleman appeared at the window of an adjoining room, made some signs, and then vanished. Enveloped in a fur coat, he could quite certainly have to be a personage enjoying the right to at least the title of Serene Highness. All this happened while Godfather Drosselmayer himself, clad in his yellow frock coat, with his eye patch and his glass periwig, resembling the godfather to the point of mistaking him for someone else, kept going in and out as if inviting the strollers to visit him.

The first moment was one of joy and surprise for the two children. But after a few minutes of contemplation, Fritz, leaning on his elbows, stood up and approached the godfather impatiently:

â€œBut Godfather Drosselmayer,â€ said Fritz, â€œWhy do you keep going in and out of the same door? You must be exhausted with all your coming and going. Leave through the downstairs door and reenter by this door.â€ And Fritz pointed at the gates of the two towers.

â€œThatâ€™s impossible!â€ the godfather responded.

â€œWell,â€ Fritz replied, â€œthen do me the favor of mounting the staircase, taking this gentlemanâ€™s place at the window, and telling him to go to the door in your place.â€

â€œImpossible, my dear little Fritz!â€ the medical counselor repeated.

â€œWell, the children have danced enough. Now they have to stroll about while the strollers dance in their turn.â€

â€œWhy, thatâ€™s unreasonable, you eternal plaintiff!â€ cried the godfather, who was starting to get annoyed. â€œSince the mechanics are made, they have to work.â€

â€œThen,â€ said Fritz, â€œI want to enter the castle.â€

â€œAh! Not this time,â€ said the judge, â€œyouâ€™re crazy, my dear son. You can see that itâ€™s impossible for you to get inside. The weathercocks on the uppermost towers barely reach your shoulders.â€

Fritz capitulated to this line of reasoning and held his tongue. But a moment later, seeing that these ladies and gentlemen were still ambling nonstop, that the children were still dancing, that the gentleman in fur kept showing up and disappearing at regular intervals, and that Godfather didnâ€™t leave his entrance, Fritz said in a strongly disillusioned tone:

â€œGodfather Drosselmayer, if all your little figures can do nothing but what they are already doing and can only keep recommencing the same thing, then you are welcome to take them back tomorrow. I just donâ€™t care about them. I prefer my horse, which runs to my will; my Hussars, which maneuver according to my command, which head right and left, forward and backward, and are not enclosed in any house; than all your poor little men who are obliged to work as the mechanics want them to work.â€

Upon these words, Fritz turned his back on his godfather and on his castle, flew over to the table, and marshaled his squadron of Hussars in battle formation.

As for Marie, she slipped away very softly, for the regular motion of all the little dolls had struck her as highly repetitive. Only as she was a charming girl with all the instincts of the heart, she had said nothing lest she afflict her godfather. Indeed, scarcely had her brother turned his back than, with a piqued tone, her godfather said to her parents:

â€œCome on! Come on! Such a masterpiece is not fit for a child. Iâ€™m going to put my castle back inside its box and carry it away.â€

But Mother approached him, and, to make up for Fritzâ€™s rudeness, she was shown the large details of the godfatherâ€™s masterpiece. He explained the works so categorically, and praised the complex gears so ingeniously. And not only did he manage to follow the spirit of the medical counselor by effacing the bad impression, but he also reached into the pockets of his yellow frock coat and brought out a multitude of little men and little women with tan skins and white eyes, as well as gilt hands and feet. Otherwise these little men and little women exuded an excellent fragrance, given that they were made of cinnamon bark.

At that moment, Mademoiselle Trudchen called Marie, giving her permission to slip into that lovely little silk gown, which had so deeply entranced Marie upon her entrance that she had asked if she could be allowed to try it on. But Marie, despite her normal politeness, didnâ€™t reply. She was too preoccupied with a new personage whom she had just discovered among her toys. I ask you, my dear children, to focus all your attention on him. You see, he is the hero of this very truthful story, in which Mademoiselle Trudchen, Marie, Fritz, the judge, his wife, and even Godfather Drosselmayer all play secondary roles.

The Little Man in the Wooden Cape

Marie, as we were saying, failed to answer Mademoiselle Trudchenâ€™s invitation because the girl had, at that very moment, discovered a new toy, which she hadnâ €™t spotted before.

Indeed, leaning mournfully against the trunk of the Christmas tree, Fritz, by making his squadrons curve and tack and twist, unmasked a charming manikin. Silent and quite suitable, the little man was waiting his turn to be seen. There would have been something to say about the figure of this manikin, whom we may have been too quick to dub â€œcharming.â€□ For one thing, his bust, overly extended and overly developed, was no longer perfectly harmonious with his tiny, skinny legs. For another thing, his head was so unreasonably gigantic that it stuck out from all the proportions indicated not only by Nature but also by the drawing masters, who know more about such things than Nature.

But if there was something imperfect about this manikin, his deficiency was redeemed by his outstanding wardrobe, which revealed him to be a man of both taste and culture. He wore a purple velvet polonaise with a quantity of golden frogs, loops, and buttons, plus matching knee breeches and the most attractive little boots that had ever graced the feet of a student or an officer; and they fitted so snugly that they looked pasted on.

But there were two strange features about a man who seemed to have a superior insight in fashion. On the one side, he had a cramped and hideous wooden cape like a pigtail that he had attached to the bottom of his neck and that fell down in the middle of his back. On the other side, he had a wicked little highlander cap, which the manikin had straightened out on his head.

On seeing these two objects, which formed a huge disparity with the rest of the costume, Marie had reflected that Godfather Drosselmayer himself wore a small collar over his yellow frock coat. This collar, scarcely more stylish than the wooden manikin with the polonaise, sometimes covered his head with a wretched and obnoxious hat, next to which all the hats in the world could suffer no comparison. However, this did not prevent Drosselmayer from being an excellent godfather. This comparison had actually said that, even if Godfather Drosselmayer were to base his entire wardrobe on that of the little wooden manikin, he would still be very far from being as gentle and as graceful.

We appreciate that Marie hadnâ€™t made these reflections without a thorough investigation of the manikin, whom she had liked at first blush. And the more she examined his face, the more goodness and sweetness she discerned in his features. Her light green eyes, which could be rebuked only for being a tad too prominent, expressed nothing but serenity and benevolence. The fluffy and curly white beard, blanketing his entire chin, looked especially good on Drosselmayer today, for Marie brought out her charming smile. Her lips may have been a bit too far apart, but they were red and brilliant. So after considering him with growing affection for over ten minutes, she exclaimed without daring to touch him:

â€œOh! Tell me! Good Father. That dear manikin over there, leaning against the Christmas treeâ€”whom does he belong to?â€□

â€œTo no one in particular!â€□ the judge replied. â€œTo all of you together!â €□

â€œHow can that be, Father dear? I donâ€™t understand you.â€□

â€œHeâ€™s the universal worker,â€□ the judge went on. â€œFrom now on, his job will be to break for you all the nuts that you eat. And he belongs to Fritz as much as to you, and to you as much as to Fritz.â€□

With those words, the judge cautiously shifted the manikin from the place where he was posted. Raising his cramped wooden cape, the judge got the manikin

to undo his mouth by way of the easiest seesaw motion. The opening mouth exposed two rows of sharp white teeth. At her fatherâ€™s bidding, Marie then stuck in a hazelnut and: Crack! Crack! The manikin crushed the nut so skillfully that the shell scattered into a thousand bits and pieces while the unbroken kernel remained in Marieâ€™s hand. The little girl now realized that this stylish manikin was a descendant of that ancient and venerated breed of Nutcrackers whose origin, as antique as that of Nuremberg, was likewise lost in the mists of time. That same manikin continued to exercise the honorable and philanthropic profession of his ancestors, while Marie, delighted to have made this discovery, started jumping for joy.

Whereupon the judge said to her: â€œWell, my good little Marie, since you like the Nutcracker so much, then even though he belongs equally to Fritz and to you, you will be put especially in charge of caring for him. I therefore place him under your protection.â€□

With these words, the judge returned the manikin to Marie, who took him into her arms and began carrying out her task. Now this captivating child had such a good heart that she selected the smallest nuts. In this way, her protÃ©gÃ© didnâ€™t have to open his mouth immeasurably, which didnâ€™t suit him and which made his physiognomy look ridiculous. Next Mademoiselle Trudchen approached him in order to enjoy, in her turn, the sight of the manikin. And for her too, Nutcracker fulfilled his assignment, performing it gracefully and cheerfully, even though Mademoiselle Trudchen was, as we know, merely a governess.

However, while continuing to train his chestnut and make his Hussars maneuver, Fritz had heard: â€œCrack! Crack! Crack!â€□ After that sound was repeated twenty times, he had realized that something new was going on. He therefore raised his head and focused his enormous and interrogative eyes on the group made up of the judge, Marie, and Mademoiselle Trudchen. In his sisterâ€™s arms, he observed the manikin with the wooden cape, and so he dismounted from his steed, and without taking the time to relocate the chestnut to the stable, he hurried over to Marie and revealed his presence with a joyous burst of laughter. His mirth was inspired by the grotesque countenance made by the manikin when it was opening its huge mouth.

Fritz now demanded his share of the nuts cracked by the manikin, and his request was granted. He also demanded the right to crack them himself since he had half ownership. Only, contrary to his sister and to his surveillance, Fritz stuffed the largest and hardest nuts into Nutcrackerâ€™s mouth. Then, at the fifth or sixth nut that Fritz had inserted, they suddenly heard: â€œCrack!â€□ And three little teeth tumbled out from the manikinâ€™s gums, whereby the chin, in pieces, became feeble and shaky like the chin of an old man.

â€œOh! My poor, dear Nutcracker!â€□ exclaimed Marie, snatching the manikin from Fritzâ€™s hands.

â€œWhat a moron!â€□ cried Fritz. â€œHe wants to be a Nutcracker, but heâ€™s got a glass jaw! Heâ€™s a phony Nutcracker; he doesnâ€™t understand his own profession! Hand him over, Marie! Iâ€™ve got to keep cracking him even if he loses the rest of his teeth and even if his chin is totally dislocated! Listen! Why are you so interested in that lazy bum anyhow?â€□

â€œNo! No! No!â€□ cried Marie, squeezing the manikin in her arms. â€œNo! You wonâ€™t have my poor Nutcracker anymore! Look! Heâ€™s watching me so horribly, showing me his poor injured jaw! Goodness! You have a nasty heart! You beat your horses. And the other day, you had one of your soldiers shot to death!â€□

â€œI beat my horses when they get unruly!â€□ Fritz retorted in his most swaggering tone of voice. â€œAs for the soldier that I had shot the other day: He was a miserable vagabond. For the year he was in my service, I hadnâ€™t managed to do anything for him. One fine morning, he deserted along with his bag and baggage. In all the countries on earth, desertion entails capital punishment! Furthermore, all these issues are matters of discipline, and they donâ€™t involve women! I donâ€™t prevent you from whipping your dolls, and you shouldnâ€™t prevent me from beating my horses and having my soldiers shot. Now I want Nutcracker!â€□

â€œOh, good Father! Save me!â€□ said Marie, enveloping the manikin in her pocket handkerchief. â€œHelp me, Father! Fritz wants to grab Nutcracker!â€□

Because of her shouting, Marie was approached not only by the judge and his group of children: The mother as well as Godfather Drosselmayer also came running. The two children each explained their reasons: the girl for keeping Nutcracker, the boy for getting him back. To her great amazement, Godfather Drosselmayer, with a smirk that looked ferocious to the little girl, sided with Fritz. Luckily for poor Nutcracker, the two parents came around to Marieâ€™s way of thinking.

â€œMy dear Fritz,â€□ said the judge. â€œIâ€™ve put Nutcracker under your sisterâ€™s protection. To the extent that my paltry medical knowledge allows me to judge his condition, I can see that poor, wretched Nutcracker is terribly injured and needs lots of attention. Therefore, until his complete recovery, I assign full power to Marie, and nobody is to find fault with my decision. Incidentally, you, who are so strong in military discipline: When have you ever seen a general return a wounded soldier to the frontâ€”a soldier wounded in the generalâ€™s service? The wounded go to the hospital and stay there until theyâ€™re cured, while the cripples have the right to army pensions.â€□

Fritz tried to impose, but the judge raised his forefinger to the level of his right eye, and these two words slipped out of him:

â€œHerr Fritz!â€□

Weâ€™ve already told you what a powerful impact these two words had on the little boy. Ashamed of having drawn this rebuke, Fritz, gentle and wordless, glided to the area of the table where he had stationed the Hussars, who, after setting up their lost sentinels and establishing their outposts, had silently retired for the night.

Meanwhile, Marie gathered Nutcrackerâ€™s minute teeth, which she kept on, wrapped in her handkerchief and supporting his chin in a lovely white ribbon taken from her silk frock. On his side, the manikin, at first very pale and very frightened, appeared to be highly confident about the kindness of his protector. Little by little, he grew more and more reassured, feeling very tenderly cradled. Marie now saw that Godfather Drosselmayer mockingly watched her applying maternal care to the manikin in the wooden cape. It even struck her that his single eye had taken on an expression of spite and malice, which she was not in the habit of finding in him. As a result, she wanted to move away from him.

Godfather Drosselmayer then burst out laughing and said: â€œGoodness, my dear goddaughter! I donâ€™t understand how a pretty girl like you can be so kind to that horrid manikin!â€□

Marie turned around. In her neighborly love, the compliment paid to her by her godfather (â€œprettyâ€□) was not sufficient compensation for the unjust attack against Nutcracker. Contrary to her nature, she was inundated by a great anger. And this vague comparison between Godfather and the manikin in the wooden cape crossed her mind:

â€œGodfather Drosselmayer,â€□ she said. â€œYouâ€™re unfair to my poor little Nutcracker, whom you call a horrid manikin! Who knowsâ€”if you even had his pretty little polonaise, his pretty little culottes, and his pretty little bootsâ€”who knows if you wouldnâ€™t look as good as he does.â€□

Marieâ€™s parents started laughing, and the medical counselorâ€™s nose grew prodigiously. Why did it grow? And why did the parents burst out laughing? That was what Marie, astonished by the effect of her reply, was trying vainly to fathom. Now since there is no effect without a cause, this effect was doubtlessly attached to some unknown and mysterious cause, which will be explained below.

Wondrous Things

I do not know, my dear little friends, if you recall that I mentioned a huge glass cabinet in which the children locked away their toys. This cabinet stood to the right of the entrance to the judgeâ€™s salon. Marie had still been in her cradle, and Fritz had barely been able to walk, when the judge had ordered this cabinet from a highly skillful artisan. The cabinetmaker had decorated the cabinet with squares so brilliant that the toys were ten times more beautiful on the shelves than in your hands.

On the topmost level, beyond the reach of Marie and Fritz, were the masterpieces of Godfather Drosselmayer. Directly underneath were the picture books, while the two shelves below were given over to Marie and Fritz, who filled them to their heartsâ€™ content. However, according to a tacit agreement, Fritz always took hold of the upper shelf for billeting his troops while Marie reserved the lower shelf for her dolls, their household goods, and their beds.

That was what happened on Christmas Day. Fritz arranged his newcomers on his upper shelf, and Marie, after relegating Mademoiselle Rose to a corner, had assigned her bedroom and her bed to Mademoiselle Claire. That was the name of the new doll, whom Marie invited over for an evening of candies. Furthermore, Mademoiselle Claire, looking all around, saw her household goods nicely arranged on the cabinet shelves. Her table was laden with bonbons and pralines, and, above all, her little white bed with its rose silk quilt was fresh and lovely. She appeared extremely satisfied with her new apartment.

Meanwhile, evening had been advancing. It was almost midnight, and Godfather Drosselmayer had long since taken his leave. The parents were unable to tear the children away from their cabinet. Contrary to his habit, though, it was Fritz who first surrendered to their reasoning: They pointed out to him that it was time he went to bed.

â€œActually,â€□ said Fritz, â€œupon getting drilled all evening, my poor, miserable Hussars must be dog tired. I know them. They are brave soldiers who are fully aware of their duty toward me. Since as long as Iâ€™m here, not a single man will permit himself to close his eyes, Iâ€™m going to retire right away.â€□

After giving them the password so they wouldnâ€™t be caught off guard by an enemy patrol, Fritz did indeed retire for the night.

Marie, however, stayed awake. Eager to join the judge, who had already gone to their bedchamber, the mother urged the girl to tear herself away from her dear cabinet.

â€œJust one more instant, a teensy instant, dear Mama,â€□ said Marie. â€œLet me finish my business here. I still have a lot of important things to take care of.

Once Iâ€™m done, I promise Iâ€™ll go to bed.â€

The voice of this both well-behaved and obedient child was so insistent that her mother saw nothing wrong in fulfilling her desire. Mademoiselle Trudchen had already gone upstairs to prepare the bed for the little girl, afraid as she was that Marie would be so absorbed in her new toys that she would forget to snuff the candles. Her mother snuffed them for her, leaving only the ceiling lamp, which spread a soft, pale light in the room. The mother retired in her turn, saying: â€œGo to bed soon, my dear little Marie. If you stayed up too late, youâ€™d be exhausted, and you might not get up tomorrow.â€ Having said those words, the mother left the salon, shutting the door behind her.

Finding herself alone, Marie took up the thought that occupied her more than any otherâ€”her poor little Nutcracker, whom she still carried in her arm, wrapped in her pocket handkerchief. She placed him gently on the table, unswaddling him and inspecting his injuries. Nutcracker appeared to be suffering greatlyâ€”at least, he seemed very disgruntled.

â€œAh. Poor manikin!â€ Marie whispered. â€œPlease donâ€™t be angry at my brother, Fritz, for all the injuries heâ€™s inflicted on you. He meant no harmâ€”you can be certain of that! Itâ€™s just that in his military life his manners have grown a bit crude, and his heart has hardened ever so slightly. Otherwise heâ€™s a very fine boyâ€”I can assure you of that. Iâ€™m convinced that when you get to know him, youâ€™ll forgive him. To make amends for what my brother has done to you, Iâ€™m going to nurse you so properly and attentively that within a few days youâ€™ll be cheerful and healthy again. As for reinserting your teeth and reattaching your chin, thatâ€™s the responsibility of Godfather Drosselmayer. Heâ€™s well versed in such things.â€

However, Marie couldnâ€™t finish her brief discourse. The moment she pronounced Godfatherâ€™s name, Nutcracker, to whom those words were addressed, made such an atrocious grimace, and his two green eyes flashed so brilliantly, that the terrified little girl halted and then stepped back. But as soon as Nutcracker regained his benevolent physiognomy and his melancholy smile, she assumed that it had all been an illusion, and that the flame of the lamp, agitated by some draft, had thus disfigured the manikin.

Marie even went so far as to make fun of herself and tell herself: â€œHonestly! It was so stupid of me to believe for even an instant that this wooden figure was capable of making faces at me. Come on! Letâ€™s go over to him and nurse him as his position requires.â€

Following this interior monologue, Marie took her protÃ©gÃ© back into her arms, stepped over to the glass cabinet, and knocked on the door that had been closed by Fritz. She then said to the new doll:

â€œI beg you, Mademoiselle Claire, please turn your bed over to my Nutcrackerâ€”heâ€™s sick. Make do for one night with the sofa. Remember that you are the picture of health, which is proved by your chubby red cheeks. Besides, one night passes quickly. The sofa is comfortable. And in all of Nuremberg there are not many dolls that are as contented as you.â€

Mademoiselle Claire, as we can imagine, did not breathe a word, though it struck the little girl that the new doll looked very glum and very peevish. But Marie, who found in her conscience that she and Mademoiselle Claire had been extra cautious, made no fuss. The girl very carefully pulled over and slipped the patient under the covers, drawing them up to his chin.

Marie then reflected that she was unacquainted with the depth of the new dollâ€™s character because she had arrived only a few hours ago. When Marie had

borrowed her bed, the doll seemed to have been in an awful mood. Moreover, Marie figured that something dreadful might have happened to the patient if the manikin were left within the range of that insolent person.

In consequence, Marie placed the bed and Nutcracker on the top shelf of the cabinet, against the lovely hamlet where Fritzâ€™s cavalry was billeted. Next, after placing Mademoiselle Claire on the sofa, Marie shut the cabinet door and was about to rejoin Mademoiselle Trudchen in her bedroom. However, the entire room around that poor girl emitted a throng of terse, dry noises behind the easy chairs, behind the stove, behind the cabinets. The big wall clock, surmounted by a huge gilded owl in lieu of the traditional cuckoo, hummed louder and louder without, however, deciding to strike amidst all this. Marie peered at the clock and she saw that the big, gilded owl had spread its wings, fully covering the dial face. The clock, as well as it could, thrust out its repulsive feline head with its round eyes and its recurved bill. The humming grew louder and louder, changing into a murmur that resembled a human voice, and you could distinguish these words, which seemed to emerge from the beak of the owl:

â€œClocks, clocks, hum very softly, Mouse King has a fine ear. Boom, boom, boom, just sing, sing the ancient song. Boom, boom, boom, ring, handbell, ring, ring the final hour, for soon he will be done for.â€□

And boom, boom, boom, they heard a dozen hollow, husky strokes. Marie was terrified. She shuddered from head to foot, and she was about to flee, when she spotted Godfather Drosselmayer sitting on the clock instead of the owl. Furthermore, the two tails of his yellow frock coat had taken the place of the two wings hanging from the night bird. Upon seeing this, Marie stopped in her tracks and she tearfully exclaimed:

â€œGodfather Drosselmayer, what are you doing up there? Come down to me, and stop trying to scare me, you wicked man!â€□

With these words, a shrill hissing and an enraged snickering could be heard all around. Soon you heard thousands of tiny feet pitter-pattering behind the walls. Then you saw thousands of tiny lights flickering through cracks in the walls. When I say â€œthousands of tiny lights,â€□ Iâ€™m mistaken. They were actually thousands of tiny, brilliant eyes. Marie realized that she was surrounded by a whole population of mice, who were preparing to enter the room. And indeed, during the next five minutes, thousands of mice came pitter-pattering through door joints, through chinks in the floor. And trot, trot, trot, and hop, hop, hop, they galloped hither and yon. Soon they lined up in the same fashion in which Fritz arranged his soldiers for battle.

The little girl really liked this disposition, for she didnâ€™t feel the natural and puerile terror that other children feel toward mice. She was probably about to enjoy this spectacle ad infinitum when she suddenly heard a dreadful hissing. It was so acute and so prolonged that it sent icy shivers up and down her spine.

At that moment, the floor rose up under Marieâ€™s feet, and, pushed by a cavernous force, Mouse King, sporting his seven crowned heads, appeared at her feet, amidst sand, plaster, and crushed soil. Each of those seven heads began to hiss and nibble hideously, while the body to which they belonged emerged in its turn. The entire mouse army dashed toward its king, squeaking three times in unison. Next, while keeping their ranks, the mouse regiments started rushing all over the room, heading toward the glass cabinet. Enveloped on all sides, the girl beat a retreatâ€”toward that cabinet.

As we have said, Marie was no scaredy-cat. But when she found herself encircled by that endless horde of mice under the command of that seven-headed

monster, she was overwhelmed with fear. Her heart pounded so intensely that her chest was ready to burst. The blood seemed to freeze in her veins. She couldnâ€™t breathe. Half fainting, she reeled backward. Finally: kling, kling, purr. The glass of the cabinet, poked by her elbow, fell on the floor, shattering into a thousand pieces.

That very instant, Marie suffered a sharp pain in her left arm, whereas her heart felt lighter, for she no longer heard those horrible squeaks, squeaks, that had terrified her. Indeed, everything around Marie had grown tranquil again. The mice had disappeared, and the girl believed that, petrified by the noise of shattering glass, those creatures had taken refuge in their holes.

However, following that almost immediate noise, a bizarre clamor resounded in the cabinet, and all the sharp, shrill voices exclaimed with all their weak might: â€œTo arms! To arms!â€□ At the same time, the castle bells started ringing, and murmurs came from all sides: â€œMayday! Mayday! Letâ€™s get up! Itâ€™s the enemy! Battle, battle, battle!â€□

Marie turned around. The cabinet was miraculously lit and it was filled with a loud hubbub. All the Harlequins, the Pierrots, the Punchinellos, and the jumping jacks were on the move, scurrying hither and yon, exhorting one another, while the dolls were shredding linen and preparing remedies for the wounded.

Finally, Nutcracker himself flung away his covers and with two feet together he leaped off the bed and onto the floor, yelling: â€œCrack! Crack! Crack! Stupid heap of mice! Get back to your holes or Iâ€™ll take care of you on the spot!â€□

However, this threat triggered a wide hissing, and Marie realized that the mice had not returned to their holes. Terrified by the clatter of shattering glass, the mice had sought refuge under the tables and under the armchairs, and now they were beginning to venture forth.

Nutcracker, far from being alarmed by the hissing, was now twice as courageous. â€œAh! Miserable Mouse King!â€□ he exclaimed. â€œSo itâ€™s you! And you finally accept the challenge that Iâ€™ve been offering you for ages! Come on! And let this night decide which of us two is the better one. As for you, my companions, my brothers! If itâ€™s true that we were linked by some tenderness in Zechariahâ€™s shop, then support me in this raw combat! Come on! Forward! Attack! And whoever loves me can follow me!â€□

No proclamation had ever had a similar effect. Two Harlequins, a Pierrot, two Punchinellos, and three jumping jacks cried out: â€œYes, my lord, you can count on us for life and for death! We will triumph under your orders or we will perish with you!â€□

Upon these words, which proved that the hearts of his friends echoed his sentiments, Nutcracker felt so thoroughly electrified that he drew his saber and, heedless of the dreadful height he was on, he hurled himself from the second shelf. Marie, seeing that perilous leap, cried out, for Nutcracker was sure to break. Now Mademoiselle Claire, who was on the lower shelf, jumped from her sofa and received Nutcracker in her arms.

â€œAh! Dear, kind little Claire!â€□ exclaimed Marie, tenderly joining her two hands. â€œHow gravely I misjudged you!â€□

But Mademoiselle Claire, fully given to the situation, told Nutcracker: â€œExcuse me, sir. Already wounded and suffering as you are, how can you risk new dangers? Stick to commanding! Let the others fight. Your courage is well known and it wonâ€™t gain anything if I furnish more proof.â€□

Speaking those words, Mademoiselle Claire tried to hold back the valiant Nutcracker. She pressed him against her silk bodice, but he wriggled and struggled so much that she was forced to let him escape. He glided from her arms and, falling

to his feet with perfect grace, he placed one knee on the floor and said to her:

â€œPrincess, rest assured that even though you were unjust to me at a certain time, I will never forget youâ€”even in the thickest fray of battle!â€□

Mademoiselle Claire leaned over him as far as she could and, clutching his little arm, she forced him to stand up again. Next, vividly removing her sparkling spangled belt, she turned it into a scarf that she wanted to slip around the young heroâ€™s neck. But he recoiled two paces. Bowing as evidence of his gratitude for such a great favor, he undid the small, white ribbon with which Marie had bandaged him. He raised the ribbon to his lips, and then drew it around his waist. Light and swift as a bird, brandishing his sword, he leaped from the shelf to the floor.

The squeaking and squealing resumed more fiercely than ever, and Mouse King, as if in response to Nutcrackerâ€™s challenge, emerged from under the huge central table. Mouse King was accompanied by his army, while to the right and to the left, the soldiers of the two wings started overrunning the armchairs, where they had entrenched themselves.

The Battle

â€œBugles, sound the charge! Drums, call to arms!â€□ hollered Nutcracker. And the bugles of Fritzâ€™s Hussars started blasting, while the drums of his infantry began beating, and you could hear the dull boom of cannons jumping on their mounts.

At the same time, a corps of musicians was formed. There were barbers with their guitars, piferaris with their accordions, Swiss shepherds with their horns, Africans with their triangles. Although not summoned by Nutcracker, they nevertheless began to descend as volunteers from shelf to shelf, playing the March of the Samnites. This got even the most peaceable men excited, and at that very moment, a kind of national guard took shape, commanded by the Swiss mercenary of the parish. The ranks were filled with Harlequins, Punchinellos, Pierrots, and jumping jacks, and in an instant, the guards, arming themselves with whatever they could grab, were prepared for combat. The last to go was a cook, who, abandoning his fire, came down with his skewer, on which he had half roasted a turkey. He now took his position in the ranks. Nutcracker gained control of this intrepid battalion, which, to the shame of the regular troops, was the first to be prepared.

We also have to reveal everything, for one might think we were blinded by our empathy with the illustrious Citizensâ€™ Militia, to which I belong. It was not the fault of Fritzâ€™s Hussars and foot soldiers that they couldnâ€™t press forward as rapidly as the others. After fixing the advanced sentinels and the outlying posts, Fritz had barracked the rest of his army, locking it up in four boxes. The unfortunate prisoners had therefore heard uselessly the drum and the bugle, which summoned them to combat. They were locked up, unable to leave. You could hear them swarming in their boxes like lobsters in a basket. But no matter how hard they tried, they were unable to escape. Finally, the grenadiers, less tightly shut than the others, managed to raise the lid of their box, and they now lent a hand to the chasseurs and the riflemen. Within an instant, they were all on their feet. Sensing how valuable the cavalry would be for them, they went to deliver the Hussars, who started capering on the flanks and lining up four abreast.

However, if the regular troops were several minutes late, they quickly made up for lost time, thanks to the discipline in which Fritz had always maintained them. Horsemen, gunners, foot soldiers started plunging down like an avalanche, amid the applause of Mademoiselle Rose and Mademoiselle Claire, who clapped their hands, watching them pass, and who egged them on with their voices and their gestures. They resembled those beautiful chatelaines from whom they were, no doubt, descended.

However, Mouse King had understood that he would be facing a full army. Indeed, at the center stood Nutcracker with his valiant Civic Guard; at the left, the Hussar regiment, waiting solely for the moment to charge; at the right, a formidable infantry. Meanwhile, on a stool that dominated the whole battlefield, a battery of ten cannons was established. Furthermore, a powerful reserve composed of gingerbread manikins and sugary cavaliers of all colors had remained in the cabinet, and now they were making their presence felt in their turn. But Mouse King was too advanced to move back. And he gave the signal with a â€œsqueak,â€□ which was echoed in unison by his entire army.

At the same time, an artillery broadside, coming from the stool, responded by shooting a hail of bullets into the thick of the mouse masses.

Almost simultaneously, the full Hussar regiment charged forth: On one side, the dust kicked up by the hooves of horses; on the other side, the thickening smoke of the cannons. Either way, Marie was unable to view the battlefield.

Still, amid the booming of cannons, the shouting of combatants, the rattling of the dying, the girl kept hearing the voice of Nutcracker prevailing over the entire fracas.

â€œSergeant Harlequin!â€□ he yelled. â€œTake twenty men, and throw yourself as a sharpshooter on the enemy flanks! Lieutenant Punchinello! Form a square! Captain Clown! Order the platoon to fire! Colonel of the Hussars! Charge in masses and not in fours, as youâ€™ve been doing! Bravo, my lead soldiers! Bravo! If everyone did their duty as you do, we would carry the day!â€□

However, through that very encouragement, Marie knew that the fighting was ferocious and the victory indecisive. The mice, thrown back by the Hussars, decimated by the platoon firing, knocked over by the hails of bullets, kept returning faster and faster, biting and shredding anything in their path! As in the melees during the period of chivalry, there was an atrocious hand-to-hand combat, in which each participant attacked and defended himself without concern for his neighbor. Nutcracker tried, ineffectively, to govern all the different movements and to proceed in terms of masses. The Hussars, shoved back by an enormous corps of mice, had scattered, and they attempted, ineffectively, to rally around their colonel. A huge battalion of mice had cut them off from the army corps, overwhelming the Civic Guard, who worked miracles.

The Swiss guard of the parish thrashed about with his halberd like a devil in a basin of holy water. The cook skewered entire ranks of mice on his spit. The lead soldiers stood like a lofty wall. But Harlequin, with his twenty men, had been repulsed and so he came here, seeking the protection of the battery. However, Lieutenant Punchinelloâ€™s square had been shattered, and, fleeing the remains, he had strewn disorder in the Civic Guard. Finally, Captain Clown had stopped shootingâ€”for lack of cartridges, no doubtâ€”and was now withdrawing, albeit only step-by-step, but at least he was moving.

As the result of this retrograde motion, which was drawn all along the front lines, the battery of cannons was fully exposed. Aware that triumph hinged on that very battery, Mouse King ordered his most seasoned troops to attack it. Within a

second, the stool was escaladed, and the gunners were killed on their guns. One gunner even set fire to his own caisson, enveloping some twenty foes in his heroic death.

But all this courage was useless against the sheer numbers, and soon a hail of bullets, taken from his own guns and striking at the very core of Nutcrackerâ€™s battalion, informed him that the battery had succumbed to enemy power.

Once the battle was lost, Nutcracker focused purely on making an honorable retreat. Still, to give his troops a breathing spell, he summoned the reserves.

The gingerbread men and the bodies of sugar candy came down from the cabinet and gave tit for tat. These troops were fresh but inexperienced. The gingerbread men were particularly awkward and, striking without rhyme or reason, they crippled friend and foe alike. The bodies of the bonbons stood their ground. But there was nothing homogenous about the combatants. They were emperors, knights, Tyroleans, gardeners, cupids, monkeys, lions, or crocodiles. So they couldnâ€™t unite their progress, and they had power only in masses.

However, their competition had one useful outcome. No sooner had the mice tasted gingerbread men and nibbled on sugar candy bodies than they abandoned their lead soldiers. It was with great difficulty that they had bitten those warriors. And they also abandoned the Punchinellos, the clowns, the Harlequins, the Swiss sentinels, and the cooks, who were simply enveloped in tow and padding. They pounced on the miserable reservists, who were instantaneously surrounded by thousands of mice. After a heroic defense, they were devoured bag and baggage.

Nutcracker wanted to profit from this moment of rest by rallying his army. But the ghastly spectacle of the annihilation of the reserves had frozen even the most fiery courage. Clown was as pale as death; Harlequinâ€™s suit was in rags; a mouse had gnawed into Punchinelloâ€™s hump and, like the young Spartanâ€™s fox, the mouse gobbled up his entrails. Finally, the Hussar colonel was taken prisoner together with a segment of his regiment. And, thanks to the horses of these wretched captives, a unit of cavalry mice had just been formed.

There was no issue of victory for unfortunate Nutcracker; nor was there an issue of retreat. The sole issue was death. Nutcracker took charge of a small group of men, who were as intent as he on selling their lives dearly.

During that time, desolation reigned among the dolls. Mademoiselle Claire and Mademoiselle Rose twisted their arms while emitting loud cries.

â€œAlas!â€□ said Mademoiselle Claire. â€œMust I die in the prime of life? I? The kingâ€™s daughter? With such a lovely future ahead of me?â€□

â€œAlas!â€□ said Mademoiselle Rose. â€œMust I die alive to the enemyâ€™s power? And havenâ€™t I taken good care of myselfâ€”only to be gnawed by filthy mice?â€□

The other dolls scurried tearfully, their cries mingling with the laments of the two principal dolls. Meanwhile, things were going from bad to worse for Nutcracker. He had just been deserted by his few remaining friends. The remnants of the Hussar squadron had sought refuge in the cabinet. The lead soldiers had fallen completely to the enemy power. The artillerists had long since been wiped out. The Civic Guard had died like the three hundred Spartans, without taking a single step back. Nutcracker was joined side by side against the edge of the cabinet, which he tried in vain to escalade. For that, he needed the help of Mademoiselle Claire or Mademoiselle Rose. But the two of them had decided to vanish.

Nutcracker made a final effort. Gathering all his resources, he cried out in the agony of despair: â€œA horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!â€□

But, like the voice of King Richard III, Nutcrackerâ€™s voice was ignoredâ€”or rather, it exposed his whereabouts to the enemy. Two sharpshooters pounced on him and grabbed him by his wooden cape. At that same moment, they heard the voice of Mouse King, whose seven heads were hollering. â€œIf you value your necks, take him alive. Remember that I have to avenge my mother. Her torture has to horrify any future Nutcrackers.â€

And the king hurled himself on the prisoner!

But Marie couldnâ€™t support that ghastly spectacle any longer. â€œOh! My poor Nutcracker!â€ she sobbed. â€œOh! My poor Nutcracker! I love you with all my heart! And now I have to watch you perish like this!â€

Marie instinctively, and without realizing what she was doing, pulled off one shoe and flung it with all her strength into the thick of the melee. She had such good aim that the terrible projectile struck Mouse King, and he rolled in the dust. At that same moment, king and army, victors and vanquished, disappeared as if obliterated. Marie felt a sharper pain than ever in her wounded arm. She wanted to reach the easy chair in order to sit. But she didnâ€™t have the strength, and so she fainted.

The Illness

When Marie awoke from her lethargic slumber, she found herself lying in her little bed. The sun, radiant and brilliant, shone through the frosted panes. Next to her sat a visitor, whom she soon recognized as Dr. Wandelstern the surgeon. Once her eyes opened, he murmured: â€œSheâ€™s awake!â€

The mother came over and scrutinized her daughter with a nervous and frightened look.

â€œAh! Dear Mama!â€ little Marie exclaimed upon perceiving her. â€œHave all those dreadful mice gone away? And was my poor Nutcracker saved?â€

â€œFor heavenâ€™s sake, my dear Marie! Stop talking nonsense! I ask you: What do the mice have to do with Nutcracker? You naughty childâ€”you scared us all half to death! And all this is what happens when children get obstinate and disobedient. You played with your dolls here until late at night. You probably dozed off, and maybe you were frightened by a little mouse. Finally, in your terror, you banged your elbow against the cabinet mirror. The gash was so bad that when Dr. Wandelstern extracted the last remaining glass fragments, he warned us that you risked cutting your artery and dying of the loss of blood. Thank God I awoke! I donâ€™t know what time it was! But I remembered that I had left you in the salon. I entered it. Poor child! You were sprawled on the floor, near the cabinet. And you were surrounded by a chaos of dolls. Clowns, Punchinellos, lead soldiers, gingerbread men, and Fritzâ€™s Hussars lay strewn around pell-mell. As for you, you were holding Nutcracker on your bleeding arm. But how come you removed your left shoe, which was only two or three steps away?â€

â€œOh! Mama, Mama!â€ replied Marie, still shuddering at the memory of all that. â€œYou can see that these are the traces of the great battle that was fought here between the dolls and the mice. What terrified me was to see the victorious mice capturing poor Nutcracker, who was in command of the army of dolls. That was when I flung my shoe at Mouse King. I donâ€™t know anything that occurred after that.â€

The surgeon blinked at the mother, who softly told Marie: â€œForget about all that, my child, and calm down. All the mice have left, and little Nutcracker is in the mirror cabinet, joyful and healthy.â€

The father entered the room in his turn and chatted with the surgeon for a long time. But of all they said, Marie caught only one word: â€œDelirium!â€

Marie guessed that they were skeptical about her story. Now that a new day was dawning, the little girl perfectly understood that they viewed everything that had happened to her as a fable. She didnâ€™t insist, she submitted to whatever they desired, for she was eager to visit her poor Nutcracker. She knew that he had retreated from the free-for-all safe and sound, and for the moment that was all she wished to know.

However, Marie was bored stiff. Because of her injured arm, she couldnâ€™t play. And when she tried to read or to leaf through a picture book, everything spun so quickly before her eyes that she had to renounce that distraction. Time dragged by horribly, and she looked forward to the evening, because that was when her mother sat at her bedside, telling her stories or reading them aloud.

One evening, the mother had just recounted the delightful story of Prince Facardin, when the door opened, and Godfather Drosselmayer stuck in his head, saying:

â€œI have to see the poor patient with my own two eyes!â€

But the instant Marie spotted Godfather Drosselmayer with his glass periwig, his eye patch, and his yellow frock coat, she was flooded with vivid memories. She recalled the night that Nutcracker had lost the famous battle against the mice, and her recollection was so intense that she involuntarily cried out:

â€œOh! Godfather Drosselmayer! You were horrible! I saw you clearly when you were straddling the clock, and your wings were covering the clock so that it couldnâ€™t strike the hours. The loud noise of the stroke would have driven away the mice. I heard you calling the king with seven heads. Why didnâ€™t you come to rescue my poor Nutcracker, you awful person, you? Alas! By not coming, you made me get woundedâ€”and in my own bed, to boot!â€

The mother listened, wide-eyed. She believed that the poor child was becoming delirious once more. Terrified, she asked her: â€œWhy, what are you saying, dear Marie? Are you losing your mind all over again?â€

â€œNot at all!â€ Marie retorted. â€œAnd Godfather Drosselmayer knows Iâ€™m telling the truth!â€

However, without responding, the godfather made hideous faces, like a man whoâ€™s been walking on live coals. All at once, he recited in a twangy monotone:

Perpendicular

Must hum.

Advance and retreat,

Brilliant squadron!

The plaintive clock

Is about to strike midnight.

The owl arrives

And the king flees.

Perpendicular

Must hum.

Advance and retreat,

Brilliant squadron!

Marie peered with more and more haggard eyes at the godfather, for he seemed even uglier than usual. She would have been atrociously scared if her mother hadnâ€™t been present, and if Fritz, who had just entered, hadnâ€™t interrupted this bizarre chant by laughing his head off.

â€œGodfather Drosselmayer!â€□ said Fritz. â€œDo you know that you are extremely clownish today? You make gestures like my old Punchinello, whom I threw behind the stoveâ€”not to mention your song, which lacks common sense.â€□

But the mother remained very serious. â€œDear Medical Counselor,â€□ she said. â€œThatâ€™s a singular joke youâ€™re playing. It appears to have no other goal than to make Marie even sicker than she is.â€□

â€œBah!â€□ replied Godfather. â€œDear Madame! Donâ€™t you recognize the clockmaker ditty that Iâ€™m in the habit of singing whenever I come here to repair your timepieces?â€□

At the same moment, he settled by Marieâ€™s bed, saying: â€œDonâ€™t be angry, dear child, just because I didnâ€™t rip out Mouse Kingâ€™s fourteen eyes with my bare hands. I knew what I was doing, and today, since I want us to be friends again, Iâ€™m going to tell you a story.â€□

â€œWhat kind of story?â€□ Marie asked.

â€œThe story of Krakatuk Nut and Princess Pirlipat. Do you know the story?â€□

â€œNo, my dear little Godfather,â€□ the girl responded, instantly becoming friends again with the clockmaker. â€œTell the story! Tell it!â€□

â€œDear Counselor,â€□ said the mother. â€œI do hope that your story wonâ€™t be as lugubrious as your song.â€□

â€œOh, no! Dear lady!â€□ Godfather replied. â€œMy story is enormously funny.â€□

â€œThen do tell us the story!â€□ the children shouted. â€œTell us!â€□

And Godfather Drosselmayer began.

The Tale of Krakatuk Nut and Princess Pirlipat

How Princess Pirlipat was born, and what great joy her birth gave her illustrious parents

In the environs of Nuremberg there was a tiny kingdom that was not Prussia or Poland or Bavaria or the Palatinate, and it was ruled by a king.

One day, the kingâ€™s wife, who was therefore a queen, gave birth to a little girl, who therefore found herself as a princess by birth, and who received the graceful and distinguished name of Pirlipat.

The king was promptly notified of this happy event. He came rushing, out of breath, and upon seeing this pretty little girl lying in her cradle, he felt the deep satisfaction of being the father of such a charming infant. He was so explosive, that he emitted loud shouts of joy, then started dancing in a whirl, and finally hopped on one foot, saying: â€œAh! Great God, you see angels every day. Have you ever seen anyone so beautiful as my Pirlipat?â€□

The king had been followed by the ministers, the generals, the high officers, the presidents, the councilors, and the judges. Seeing the king dancing and hopping, they all started dancing like him, saying: â€œNo, no, never, Sire! No, no, never! Thereâ€™s no one in the world so beautiful as your Pirlipat!â€□

Indeed, my dear children, you will be surprised to learn that no flattery was intended in that response. For there had never been a more beautiful child than Princess Pirlipat since the creation of the world. Her little face seemed woven out of delicate silk flakesâ€”rosy as the roses and white as the lilies. Her eyes were the most sparkling azure, and nothing was more charming than to see the golden threads of her hairdo fuse into darling ringlets, crisp and brilliant curls on alabaster shoulders.

We must add that upon first seeing the light of day, the princess had brought along two rows of tiny teethâ€”or rather, veritable pearls. Two hours later, the Grand Chancellor, being myopic, got too close to the baby, who bit the manâ€™s finger so vigorously, that despite his adherence to the school of the Stoics, he screamed.

A few people claim that he shrieked: â€œDamn it!â€□

Others maintain that in honor of philosophy, he merely said: â€œOw! Ow! Ow! â€□

Today, opinions on this major issue are still divided, since neither of these two parties cares to give in. The only thing on which the â€œDamn itsâ€□ and the â€œOw! Ow! Ows!â€□ agree, the sole fact that remains incontestable, is that Princess Pirlipat did indeed bite the Grand Chancellorâ€™s finger. This showed the kingdom that there was as much mind as beauty in Pirlipatâ€™s little body. Thus, everyone was happy in this country that was favored by heaven.

Only the queen was tremendously nervous and troubled, but nobody knew why. What struck people most of all was the vigilance with which this anxious mother had the infantâ€™s cradle watched. Not only were all the doors protected by the trabants of the guard, but, aside from the two ladies-in-waiting who stayed near the queen, there were six others seated around the cradle and spelling one another every night. However, what piqued curiosity to the highest degree was something that no one understood: Why was each lady-in-waiting compelled to hold a cat on her lap and to scratch it all night long so that it wouldnâ€™t stop purring?

I am convinced, my dear children, that you are as curious as the inhabitants of that little anonymous kingdom to solve the mystery of the cats. Why did the six ladies have to each keep a cat on her lap and scratch it incessantly so that it wouldnâ€™t stop purring? Well, since youâ€™ll never solve the enigma, Iâ€™ll explain it and spare you the headache that would probably result for you.

One day, half a dozen of the finest sovereigns agreed to simultaneously visit our heroineâ€™s future father-in-law, for at that time Princess Pirlipat had not been born as yet. The visiting sovereigns were accompanied by the most agreeable crown princes, hereditary grand dukes, and pretenders. For our host, who was one of the most glorious of monarchs, this was an occasion to make a huge breach in his treasury and to put on lots of tournaments, tilting matches, and plays.

But that wasnâ€™t all. Through the Superintendent of the Royal Kitchens, the king learned that the royal astrologer had announced that it was time to slaughter the pigs. Since the conjunction of the stars proclaimed that this would be a favorable year for cold cuts, the king ordered a vast butchery of pigs in his farmyards. Stepping into his carriage, he now made the rounds personally, each visitor in turn. He was inviting all the kings and princes now staying in the capital to join him in a snack. He wanted to delight in their surprise at the sight of the outstanding meal that he was planning for them. Next, upon coming home, he had himself announced to the queen, and, approaching her, he spoke in a caressing tone that he was in the habit of employing to get what he wanted from her:

â€œGood, darling, you havenâ€™t forgottenâ€”have you?â€”how much I love blood pudding? You havenâ€™t forgotten, have you?â€

At the kingâ€™s very first word, she caught her husbandâ€™s drift. Indeed, with those insidious words, His Majesty quite simply meant that she was to devote herself, as she had so often done, to a very useful occupation. Her royal hands were to prepare the greatest possible number of sausages, chitterlings, and blood sausages. The queen therefore smiled at her husbandâ€™s declaration. For, while very honorably exercising the profession of queen, she was less sensitive to compliments about her dignity in holding the crown and the scepter than about her skill in making a pudding or a baba. She therefore contented herself with gracefully curtsying to her husband, while telling him that she was his servant in regard to a blood sausage and to everything else.

The Grand Treasurer was to deliver to the royal kitchens the gigantic vermilion cauldron and the enormous silver pots. Next, an immense sandalwood fire was kindled. The queen slipped into her kitchen apron, which was made of white damask, and soon the sweetest fragrances wafted out from the cauldron. These delicious aromas quickly spread through the corridors, swiftly filled all the chambers, and then reached the throne room, where the king was holding counsel.

The king was a gourmet, and so the fragrance made a vivid and pleasurable impression on him. However, since he was an earnest ruler, with a reputation for self-control, he at first resisted the attraction that was pulling him toward the kitchen. But finally, whatever his sway over his passions may have been, he had to yield to the inexpressible ecstasy he was experiencing.

â€œGentlemen,â€ he cried out, saying: â€œWith your permission, Iâ€™ll be right back. Wait for me!â€

And dashing through chambers and corridors, the king raced to the kitchen, hugged his wife, stirred the contents of the cauldron with his gold scepter, licked it with the tip of his tongue, and, more tranquil though a bit distracted, he returned to the counsel and resumed the discussion where he had interrupted it.

The king had left the kitchen at the crucial moment when the bacon, chopped into small pieces, was about to be roasted on silver grills. The queen, encouraged by the praises she enjoyed, dedicated herself to that important occupation, and the first drops of grease sizzled as they fell on the coalsâ€”when suddenly a faint, tremulous voice piped up:

â€œSister dear, do offer me a piece of bacon. Since Iâ€™m also a queen, I want to gorge myself! I seldom get any decent food, so I wish to have my share of that tasty morsel.â€

The queen recognized the voice. It belonged to Lady Mouserink, who had been living in the palace for many long years. She claimed that she was related to the royal family and that she herself was a queen of the Mouse Kingdom. That was why she kept a large court under the kitchen hearth.

The queen was a very good and very gentle person. Out loud, she refused to recognize Lady Mouserink as queen and as sister. But when the queen murmured softly, she showed the lady a vast amount of complaisance and consideration. Her husband, who often reproached her for that, was more of an aristocrat than she, while she had a tendency to depart from custom. Thus we can readily understand why, in this solemn circumstance, the queen didnâ€™t care to refuse to give her young friend what she asked for. Instead, she commanded:

â€œAdvance, Lady Mouserink, advance fearlessly. I authorize it. Taste as much of my bacon as you wish!â€

Lady Mouserink appeared merry and lively, and when she jumped into the fireplace, her little hand adroitly seized the pieces of bacon that the queen gave her one after another.

However, drawn by the tiny cries of pleasure uttered by their queen, and especially by the succulent aroma of the grilled bacon, many visitors kept hopping and skipping. First came Lady Mouserinkâ€™s seven sons, then her relatives, then her kinfolkâ€”all of them very wicked rascals. They were so terribly fond of their food, and they pounced so intently on the bacon, that the queen, albeit very hospitable, had to point out to them that, if they kept gobbling at that rate, no bacon would be left for the blood sausages. Still, however valid that protest, Lady Mouserinkâ€™s seven sons paid it no heed. Setting a poor example for their relatives, and ignoring the rebukes of their mother and queen, they gorged themselves on their auntâ€™s bacon.

This bacon was on the verge of disappearing altogetherâ€”when the cries of the queen, who could no longer manage to drive out her unwanted guests, drew the attention of the wife of the Superintendent of the Royal Kitchens. She, in turn, summoned the head of the kitchens, who summoned the head of the scullions, who came racing, armed with canes, fans, switches, and brooms. And they succeeded in getting the whole Mouse folk back under the hearth.

But victory, though complete, came too soon. There remained scarcely one-fourth of the bacon necessary for cooking up sausages, chitterlings, and blood puddings. According to the indications of the Royal Mathematician, who had been hastily sent for, the residual bacon was scientifically divided between the grand cauldron for blood puddings and the two grand pots for chitterlings and sausages.

Half an hour later, the cannons boomed, the bugles and trumpets blared, and the guests arrived: all the potentates, all the crown princes, all the hereditary dukes, and all the pretenders, and all wearing their most magnificent garb. Some rode in crystal carriages, others were mounted on parade horses. The king awaited them on the perron of the palace, welcoming them with the most amiable courtesy and the most gracious cordiality. After conducting them to the dining hall, he sat down at the head of the table in his quality of suzerain. With his crown on his head and his scepter in his hand, he invited the other monarchs to settle each in the seat assigned by his rank amid the crowned heads, the crown princes, the hereditary dukes, and the pretenders.

The table was laden sumptuously, and everything went smoothly between the soup and the next course. But during the chitterlings course, they noticed that the king looked agitated. With the sausage course, he turned considerably pale. Finally, with the blood pudding course, he peered up at the heavens, sighs escaped his chest, and an agony seemed to rip his soul apart. Eventually, he leaned back in his chair and covered his face with both hands, despairing and sobbing so lamentably that the diners stood up from their places and surrounded him in extreme anxiety.

Indeed, the crisis seemed dreadfully grim. In vain did the Royal Surgeon check the pulse of the wretched monarch, who appeared to be under the brunt of the deepest, most appalling, most unbelievable of calamities. In the end, after the surgeon tried the most violent remediesâ€”such as burned feathers, Epsom salts, and keys on his spineâ€”the king seemed to be coming to somewhat. He half opened his lackluster eyes, and in a very feeble, almost inaudible voice, he stammered this brief phrase:

â€œNot enough bacon!â€¦â€□

Now it was the queen who turned pale. She fell to her knees, exclaiming in a voice broken by sobs:

â€œOh! My unhappy, unfortunate royal consort! What grief havenâ€™t I caused you by disregarding your remonstrances so often? Now you see the culprit on her knees, and you can punish her as harshly as you wish.â€□

â€œWhatâ€™s this all about?â€□ asked the king. â€œWhat havenâ€™t I been told?â€□

â€œAlas! Alas!â€□ the queen responded. Her husband had never spoken so crudely to her. â€œAlas! Alas! Itâ€™s Lady Mouserink, with her seven sons, with her nephews, her cousins, and her kinfolk, who has devoured all the bacon.â€□

The queen could talk no further. All her energy was sapped. She fell back in a faint.

The king rose furiously to his feet and he turned to the wife of the Superintendent of the Royal Kitchens: â€œMadame! Whatâ€™s the meaning of this?â€□

The superintendentâ€™s wife recounted whatever she knew. Upon hearing the queenâ€™s cries, she had hurried over and she had found Her Majesty pitted against Lady Mouserinkâ€™s entire family. The superintendentâ€™s wife had then called the kitchen head, who, with the help of his pots, had managed to dispatch all the pillagers back under the hearth. The king, seeing that a crime of lÃ¨se-majestÃ© had been committed, gathered all his calm and all his dignity. Given the enormity of this heinous offense, the king ordered an immediate assembly of his cabinet, and the whole business was explained to his most skillful councilors.

The cabinet met and, by a majority of votes, it decided that Lady Mouserink had to stand trial. She was accused of eating the bacon that was meant for the kingâ€™s sausages, blood puddings, and chitterlings, and if she was found guilty, she would be exiled forever from the kingdom, she and her entire race, and whatever she owned, all her goods, estates, castles, palaces, royal residencesâ€”they would all be confiscated.

However, the king pointed out to his Privy Council and to his dexterous councilors that, during the period of the trial, Lady Mouserink and her family would have lots of time to keep eating her bacon. This would expose the king to affronts like the ones he had just endured in the presence of six crowned heads, not to mention the crown princes, the hereditary dukes, and the pretenders. The king therefore requested a discretionary power in regard to Lady Mouserink and her family. The council, as we can imagine, voted pro forma, granting the monarch the

discretionary power he had asked for.

Next, the king dispatched one of his finest coaches, preceding it by a courier to hasten the trip. The monarch was sending for an excellent technician who lived in the town of Nuremberg. His name was Christian-Elias Drosselmayer. The king promptly summoned him to his palace for an urgent matter.

Drosselmayer obeyed instantly, for he was a true artist, who never doubted that such a renowned monarch would summon him to create a masterpiece. The technician mounted the coach, which sped day and night until he was in the kingâ €™s presence. Drosselmayer had dashed so quickly that he hadnâ€™t had time to don a suit. Instead, he wore his habitual yellow frock coat. But rather than being angry at this breach of etiquette, the king was grateful. For if the illustrious technician had made a mistake, it meant that he would have been following His Majestyâ€™s orders without delay.

The king, receiving Drosselmayer in his study, described the situation. He had decided to set a great example by purging his entire kingdom of the Mouse race. Alerted by the technicianâ€™s vast renown, the king had singled him out to be the executor of his justice. The monarch had only one fear: namely, that no matter how adroit, the technician might see insurmountable difficulties in the project conceived by the royal anger.

But Drosselmayer reassured the king, promising him that by the end of a week, there wouldnâ€™t be a mouse left anywhere in the kingdom.

That same day, the technician started constructing small, oblong, ingenious boxes. Inside each box, he attached a piece of bacon at the end of a wire. By pulling the bacon, the thief, whoever he might be, dropped the door behind him, thus making him a prisoner. In less than a week, one hundred such boxes had been crafted, and they were placed not only beneath the hearth, but also in all the garrets and all the cellars of the palace.

Lady Mouserink was infinitely too wise and too shrewd not to expose Master Drosselmayerâ€™s ruse at first blush. She therefore assembled her seven sons, her nephews, and her cousins, to warn them of the ambushes lying in wait for them. But after seeming to listen because of the respect they owed her rank and the gracious condescendence commanded by her age, the mice retreated, laughing at those terrors. Drawn by the aroma of the roasted bacon, a fragrance headier than any possible protests, they figured they would take advantage of the windfall, which arrived without their knowing from where.

By the end of twenty-four hours, Lady Mouserinkâ€™s seven sons, eighteen of her nephews, fifty of her cousins, and two hundred thirty-five of her relatives of different degrees, not counting thousands of her subjects, were caught in the mousetraps, and were shamefully executed.

Lady Mouserink, together with the remnants of her court and the relics of her people, resolved to abandon these places that were stained with the blood of her homeland massacres. The rumors about her resolution transpired and they reached the king. His Majesty congratulated himself, and the court poets produced many sonnets on his victory, while the courtiers compared him to Sesostris, to Julius Caesar, to Alexander the Great.

Only the queen was sad and nervous. She knew Lady Mouserink, and she suspected that the lady would not leave her sons and her kinfolk unavenged. Now, in order to make the king forget her mistake, the queen was preparing, with her own hands, the chopped liver that he loved so much. Suddenly, Lady Mouserink emerged before her and she said to her:

Killed by your spouse without remorse or fear,

Dead are my sons, my nephews, and my cousins dear.

But tremble, tremble, Your Majesty!

The child you carry in your womb today,

Soon the object of your love,

Itâ€™s now the object of your hate.

Your spouse has forts, cannons, soldiers,

Technicians, state councilors,

Cabinet ministers, mousetraps,

Mouse Queen has none of these things,

But heaven gave her the teeth that you see!

To devour the heiresses.

Then she disappeared, and no one had laid eyes on her again. However, the queen had realized a few days ago that she was indeed pregnant. She was so terrified by Lady Mouserinkâ€™s prediction that she dropped the chopped liver into the fire.

Thus Lady Mouserink had, for a second time, deprived the king of one of his favorite dishes. He hit the roof, and he applauded himself all the more for the coup that he had so happily committed.

Needless to say, Christian-Elias Drosselmayer was sent home with a splendid reward, and he entered Nuremberg in triumph.

Despite all the precautions taken by the queen, Lady Mouserink carries out her threat in regard to Princess Pirlipat

Now, my dear children, you know as well as I doâ€”donâ€™t you?â€”why the queen so tightly guarded the miraculous little princess. She feared Lady Mouserinkâ€™s revenge. According to what the lady had said, the point was no worse, for the heiress to the happy little nameless kingdom, than the loss of her life, or at least the loss of her beautyâ€”which, we are assured, is far worse for a woman.

What increased, above all, the agitation of the tender mother was that Master Drosselmayerâ€™s devices could do absolutely nothing against the experience with Lady Mouserink.

It is true that the court astrologer, who was also the Grand Augur and the Grand Astrologer, was scared that he might be discharged for being useless if he didnâ €™t stick his nose into this whole business. He now claimed he had definitively read in the stars that only the family of the illustrious Tomcat Murr was able to defend the cradle against the approach of Lady Mouserink. That was why each of the six ladies-in-waiting was forced to keep a male feline of that kingdom incessantly in her lap. Furthermore, that family was attached to the court in their quality of private legation secretariesâ€”catsâ€”whereby a delicate and prolonged scratching was meant to soften these young diplomats, sweeten the laborious service they performed for the state.

But one evening (as you know, my children, there are days when you wake up fast asleep), one evening, the six ladies-in-waiting were sitting around the room as usual, each lady with a cat in her lap. Those six ladies, plus the two intimate ones sitting at the head of the bed, felt gradually sleepier and sleepier despite their efforts to stay awake.

Now each lady kept her feelings to herself, refusing to confide them in her companions and hoping they wouldnâ€™t notice her lack of vigilance. They would thereby watch over her place while she slept. As a result, their eyes closed successively, their hands stopped scratching the cats, and the cats took advantage of the circumstance to doze off.

We couldnâ€™t tell you how long this bizarre slumber lasted, but around midnight one of the intimate ladies woke up with a start. All the persons around her seemed to have fallen into a lethargy. Not the slightest snoring could be heard. Not the faintest breath. The chamber was filled with a deathly hush, in the midst of which nothing could be perceived aside from the worm chewing through the wood. And what happened to the intimate lady-in-waiting upon her seeing a huge and horrible mouse who, standing on her hind legs, had plunged her head into Princess Pirlipatâ€™s cradle and seemed engrossed in gnawing the infantâ€™s face? What happened? The lady-in-waiting stood up and shrieked in terror. Everyone else awoke.

Lady Mouserinkâ€”for thatâ€™s who it wasâ€”dashed toward one of the corners of the chamber. The â€œprivate legation councilorâ€ (the cat) raced after her. Alas! He was too late! Lady Mouserink had escaped through a crack in the floor. That same moment, the princess, aroused by all the hubbub, burst into tears. The ladies-in-waiting and the intimate ladies responded with cries of joy. â€œPraise the Lord!â€ they exclaimed. Since the princess had exclaimed something, she couldnâ€™t be dead.

And they hurried over to the cradle. But imagine their despair when they saw what had ensued for that charming and delicate creature! That white and rosy face, that small head with golden hair, that mirror of the sky, those azure eyes had been supplanted by an immense and deformed head thrust upon a misshapen and shriveled body. Her two lovely eyes had lost their celestial color and, green, fixed, and haggard, they had blossomed on head level. Her little lips were extended from ear to ear, and her chin was covered with a crisp and fluffy beard that was altogether suitable for an old Punchinello but hideous for a young princess.

At that instant, the queen entered. The six ordinary ladies-in-waiting and the two intimate ones threw themselves facedown on the floor, while the six legation councilors (cats) looked around for an open window so that they might gain the rooftops.

The poor motherâ€™s despair was dreadful. She fainted, and they carried her into the royal chamber.

But it was the miserable father whose torment was seen above allâ€”dreary and profound as it was. They had to padlock his casement windows to keep him from leaping out. They padded his apartment to prevent him from smashing against the walls. Needless to say, they removed his sword, and they didnâ€™t overlook any knife or fork lying aroundâ€”or any other pointed or cutting implement. This was all the easier, given that he ate nothing during the first two or three days. Instead, he continued reiterating nonstop: â€œOh! What a monarch I am! Oh, destiny! How cruel you are!â€

Perhaps, instead of accusing destiny, the king should have figured that, like all men, he was the artisan of his own suffering. He might have eaten his blood pudding with a bit less bacon than usual. Furthermore, renouncing all vengeance, he might have left Lady Mouserink and her family under the hearth. The misfortune he would have then bewailed would have never come to pass. However, the kingâ€™s reflections did not follow that philosophical route.

On the contrary: Powerful men always believe they need to blame smaller men for any calamities they endure, and so the king shifted responsibility to the skillful technician Christian-Elias Drosselmayer. Quite convinced that, if he returned to court, he would be hanged or beheaded, the technician would ignore any invitation. Instead, he was urged to come and receive a new category that His Majesty had created purely for artists, technicians, and literati.

Master Drosselmayer was not free of pride. He felt that the red ribbon of the Legion of Honor would look good against his yellow frock coat. So he instantly started out. But his joy soon changed into terror. For at the border of the kingdom, sentries were waiting for his arrival. They grabbed hold of the technician and conducted him, brigade by brigade, to the capital.

The king, who, no doubt, feared that Drosselmayer might be moved, didnâ€™t even welcome him in the palace. He was taken straight to Pirlipatâ€™s cradle and told that if, within a month from today, the princess wasnâ€™t restored to her natural state, the technician would pitifully have his head chopped off.

Master Drosselmayer laid no claim to heroism, nor had he ever expected to die anything but a natural death, as the idiom goes. So that threat horrified him. Nonetheless, he soon relied on his knowledge, whereby his personal modesty never prevented him from appreciating the vast scope of his learning. A bit reassured, the technician instantly focused on the first and now the most useful operation. He had to determine whether Pirlipatâ€™s illness could be treated with a remedy or whether it was actually incurable, as he had ascertained from the very beginning.

To this end, he very adroitly disassembled the princess: first the head; then all the limbs one after another. He detached her feet and her hands in order to more comfortably examine not only the joints and the springs, but also the inner construction. Alas! The deeper he delved into the mystery of the Pirlipatian organization, the further he perceived that the more the princess grew, the more hideous and malformed she would become.

The technician therefore cautiously reattached the limbs of the princess. Not knowing what to do or what to become, he lapsed into a profound melancholy. He remained near the cradle, which he was not allowed to leave until the princess had regained her initial form.

Now the fourth week arrived, and it reached Wednesday. As was his habit, the king came by to see if there was any change in the appearance of the princess. Seeing that her exterior was still the same, the king, shaking his scepter at the technician, cried out:

â€œChristian-Elias Drosselmayer, be warned! Youâ€™ve got only three days left to render my daughter as she was before. And if you stubbornly fail to cure her, youâ€™ll be decapitated this Sunday!â€□

Master Drosselmayer, whose failure was due not so much to obstinacy as to incapacity, started weeping bitterly. With his eyes full of tears, he watched Princess Pirlipat cracking a hazelnut as merrily as if she were the prettiest girl in the world. Now, at that poignant scene, the technician was first struck by a particular delight that the princess had enjoyed since birthâ€”a taste for hazelnuts, which was coupled with the remarkable circumstance that she had been born with teeth. Indeed, with her transformation, she started shouting, and she continued to do so, until, finding a filbert within easy reach, she cracked it, ate the almond, and tranquilly fell asleep. Ever since that time, the two intimate ladies made sure to stuff their pockets with nuts, and to give the princess one or more nuts as soon as she made a face.

â€œOh! Instinct of nature! Eternal and impenetrable sympathy with all created beings!â€□ exclaimed the technician. â€œYou show me the door that leads to the solutions of your mysteries. I will knock, and the door will open!â€□

With these words, which astonished the king, the technician asked His Majesty for permission to consult the court astrologer. The king consented, but only under a heavy escort. Master Drosselmayer would, no doubt, have preferred to go alone. However, since he wasnâ€™t the least bit free to make his own choice, he had to suffer the inevitable and walk along the streets of the capital, escorted like a common criminal.

When the technician reached the astrologer, the two men embraced each other in a torrent of tears, for they had been deeply loving friends for a very long time. They withdrew to an isolated study, and together they leafed through countless tomes about instincts, sympathies, antipathies, and a host of other topics that were no less mysterious.

That night, finally, the astrologer climbed his tower, assisted by the technician, who was himself quite skillful in such matters. Despite the encumbrance of endlessly crisscrossing lines, they discovered a remedy for the princessâ€™s condition. In order to break the spell that made her ugly and in order to restore her full beauty, she needed to do only one thing. She had to eat a Krakatuk Nut, which had a shell so hard that a forty-eightâ€“millimeter cannon could have rolled across it without breaking it. Furthermore, the Nut had to be broken in Pirlipatâ€™s presence by the teeth of a young man who had never shaved, and who, so far in his life, had worn only boots. And lastly, he had to present the almond to the princess with his eyes closed; and, with his eyes still shut, he had to take seven steps backward without stumbling. Such was the answer provided by the stars.

Drosselmayer and the astrologer had been working nonstop for three days and three nights, in order to clear up this whole mysterious affair. It was precisely Saturday evening. The king had completed his dinner and he was tackling his dessert, when the technician, doomed to lose his head at the crack of dawn, entered the royal dining hall. Joyful and lively, he announced that he had finally discovered a method for restoring the princessâ€™s lost beauty. Upon hearing this news, the king squeezed the technician in his arms with touching benevolence and he asked what the method was.

The technician reported the outcome of his consultation with the astrologer.

â€œI knew, Master Drosselmayer,â€□ the king exclaimed, â€œthat you were not being stubborn in everything you were doing! Fine! Itâ€™s settled! Weâ€™ll get to work right after dinner. Make sure, my very dear technician, that within ten minutes, the unshaven and booted young man will be here with Krakatuk Nut in his

hand. See to it, above all, that as of now he drinks no wine, so he wonâ€™t stumble when he backs up like a lobster, moving seven paces. But once the procedure is finished, tell him that Iâ€™ll put my wine cellar at his complete disposal, and he can get dead drunk to his heartâ€™s content.â€

To the kingâ€™s great amazement, Master Drosselmayer seemed dismayed when he heard that discourse. Since Drosselmayer was holding his tongue, the king insisted on knowing why he was silent and why he was glued to the spot instead of setting out to implement the sovereign orders.

â€œSire,â€ said the technician, kneeling down, â€œitâ€™s true that we have tracked down the method for healing the princess. As we have said, this method consists of having her eat Krakatuk Nut while the Nut is cracked by a young man who has never shaved and who has always worn boots since his birth. Alas! We have neither the young man nor the Nut. We donâ€™t know where to find them and, in all likelihood, we will have an awful time locating Nut and Nutcracker.â€

The king hit the roof. He brandished his scepter over the technicianâ€™s head and shouted:

â€œFine! Then death it is!â€

However, the queen knelt down next to Drosselmayer. She pointed out to her august consort that if the technician were beheaded, they would forfeit the last glimmer of hope, which would be preserved only if he were allowed to live. In all probability, the man who found the horoscope would also catch Nut and Nutcracker. They had to believe all the more strongly in the astrologerâ€™s new forecast since none of his predictions had ever come true. Sooner or later, his prognoses had to be right, given that the king, who could never be wrong, had made him his Grand Augur. The princess, barely three months old, was hardly prepared for marriage. Indeed, she probably wouldnâ€™t be ready until the age of fifteen. Hence, Master Drosselmayer and his friend the astrologer had fourteen years and nine months ahead of them in their search for Krakatuk Nut and for the young man who was fated to crack it. One could therefore grant Christian-Elias Drosselmayer a delay, at the end of which he would come back and place himself in the kingâ€™s handsâ€”whether or not he possessed the twofold remedy for curing the princess. If he didnâ€™t have the remedy, then he would be mercilessly decapitated; and if he did have the remedy, then he would be generously rewarded.

On that special day, the king had dined to perfection on his two favorite dishes: blood pudding and chopped liver. Being a just man, he lent a benevolent ear to the request of his sensitive and magnanimous spouse. He decided that the technician and the astrologer should instantly depart in their search for Nut and Nutcracker. The king granted them fourteen years and nine months, but solely on condition that at the expiration of that period, the two men would come back and place themselves in the monarchâ€™s power. Should they return empty-handed, he could do with them whatever his royal pleasure liked.

If, on the other hand, they brought back Krakatuk Nut, which was supposed to restore the princessâ€™s original beauty, they would be duly rewarded. The astrologer would receive a lifelong pension of a thousand ducats plus the Telescope of Honor, and the technician would receive a diamond-studded sword, the Order of the Golden Spider (the great order of the state), and a new frock coat. As for finding a young man who was to crack the Nut, the king was less nervous about him. He maintained that they would locate him through reiterated advertisements in native and foreign gazettes.

Touched by this magnanimity, which reduced the difficulty of his task by half, Drosselmayer swore that he would either find Krakatuk Nut or, like the Roman

general Regulus, put himself in the kingâ€™s hands.

That same evening, the technician and the astrologer left the capital of the kingdom and began their search.

How the technician and the astrologer explored
the four corners of the earth and discovered a fifth corner
without finding Krakatuk Nut

The technician and the astrologer had already been wandering fourteen years and five months without encountering even a hint of their quest. They had investigated first Europe, then America, then Africa, and then Asia. They had even determined that the world has a fifth part, which scholars have since named New Holland because it was discovered by two Germans.

Now throughout their peregrination, the technician and the astrologer had viewed countless nuts of different shapes and sizes, but they had never stumbled upon Krakatuk Nut. However, in hopes that, alas, proved useless, they had spent many years at the courts of the King of Dates and the Prince of Almonds. They had also, to no avail, consulted the famous Academy of Green Monkeys and the renowned Naturalist Society of Squirrels. Finally, devastated by fatigue, they collapsed on the edge of the great forest that borders on the foot of the Himalayas, and there, profoundly discouraged, they repeated to one another that they had no more than one hundred twenty-two days left to find what they had been futilely hunting for fourteen years and five months.

If I recounted, my dear children, the miraculous adventures that the two seekers had suffered in the course of their long odyssey, I would have to bring us all together every evening for at least a month, which, in the end, would certainly bore you. I will tell you only that Christian-Elias Drosselmayer was the fiercer searcher because his head depended on that famous Nut. Having endured more exhaustion and risked more danger than his companion, he had lost all his hair because of a sunstroke on the equator, and he had lost his right eye because of an arrow shot by a Caribbean chieftain.

Furthermore, the technicianâ€™s yellow frock coat, which had not exactly been new when he had left Germany, was now literally falling to pieces. His situation was therefore utterly deplorable, and yet such is a manâ€™s love of life that, thoroughly injured by his successive damages, he waited, with ever-mounting terror, for the moment that he would go and place himself in the hands of the king.

Still, the technician was a man of honor. There was no bargaining on such a solemn occasion. He therefore resolved, whatever it might cost him, to head back to Germany tomorrow. Indeed, there was no time to lose. Fourteen years and five months had worn by, and the two travelers, as we have said, had no more than one hundred twenty-two days to reach the capital of Princess Pirlipatâ€™s fatherâ€™s kingdom. Drosselmayer informed his friend the astrologer of his courageous resolution, and they decided to start back the next morning.

And indeed, at the crack of dawn, the two travelers slogged out toward Baghdad, from Baghdad they reached Alexandria, in Alexandria they set sail to Venice, from Venice they reached the Tyrol, and from the Tyrol they descended into Princess Pirlipatâ€™s fatherâ€™s kingdom. During their trek, they had very faintly hoped, from the bottom of their hearts, that the king would be dead or at least in his dotage.

Alas! Neither was the case. Upon their arrival in the capital, the unhappy technician learned that the worthy monarch not only had lost none of his intellectual faculties, but he was even healthier than ever. So the technician was doomedâ€”unless the princess was healed of her own accord (which was impossible) or the kingâ€™s heart had softened (which was improbable). Hence, the technician could not elude his dreadful fate.

Still, he presented himself no less boldly at the palace gates, for he was sustained by the idea that he was performing a heroic action. He then asked to speak to the king.

The king, who was a highly accessible ruler, welcoming anyone who had business with him, ordered his master of ceremonies to bring in the two foreigners. The master of ceremonies pointed out to His Majesty that these two men looked very shady, and that their clothes were incredibly tattered. The king replied that one mustnâ€™t judge the heart by the face, and that the habit did not make the monk.

The master of ceremonies, grasping the validity of both proverbs, bowed respectfully and went to summon the technician and the astrologer.

The king was still the same, so they recognized him on the spot. But the two travelers, especially the poor technician, had changed so thoroughly that they were obliged to state their names.

Upon seeing the two men return of their own free will, the king felt a surge of joy, for he was convinced that they wouldnâ€™t have shown up again if they hadnâ€™t found Krakatuk Nut. But he was soon undeceived. The technician, throwing himself at the kingâ€™s feet, confessed to him that, despite the most assiduous and conscientious efforts, the technician and his friend, the astrologer, were returning empty-handed.

The king, as we have said, had a bit of a temper, but at bottom his character was outstanding. He was touched by the fact that Drosselmayer had kept his word punctually. So he commuted the original death sentence to lifelong incarceration. As for the astrologer, the monarch was content to exile him.

However, since there were still three days left until the completed deadline of fifteen years and nine months, Master Drosselmayer, who loved his country to the ***n***th degree, asked the kingâ€™s permission to profit from those three days by visiting Nuremberg one last time.

This request struck the king as so just that he granted it with no restrictions. The technician, who had only three days for himself, resolved to make good use of the time. As luck would have it, he got seats on the stagecoach, and the two travelers departed instantly. Since the astrologer was in exile, it was all the same to him whether he went to Nuremberg or elsewhere, and so he joined the technician.

The next morning, they reached Nuremberg around ten A.M. Since Master Drosselmayer had only one relative here, his brother Christophe-Zacharias Drosselmayer, a premier toy dealer in Nuremberg, the two travelers went to his home.

This brother was delighted to see poor Christian, whom he had thought dead. At first, he couldnâ€™t recognize the technician because of his baldness and his eye patch. But the visitor showed him his famous yellow frock coat, which, tattered as it was, had preserved a few traces of its original color. In support of that initial proof, the visitor evoked many secret incidents that could be known only by the two brothers, so that the toy dealer had to yield to the facts.

He now asked his brother why he had stayed away from his native town for such a long time, and in what country he had left his hair, his eye, and the holes in his frock coat.

Christian-Elias Drosselmayer had no reason to hide his experiences from his brother. He therefore began by introducing his fellow sufferer. Next, having implemented this customary formality, he described all his misfortunes from A to Z. He ended by saying he had only a few hours to spend with his brother, since, unable to find Krakatuk Nut, he would be entering eternal imprisonment tomorrow.

During that discourse, the toy dealer had repeatedly shaken his fingers, hopped on one leg, and clucked. In an entirely different circumstance, the technician would have most likely asked him what those motions signify. But he was so absorbed in recounting his adventures that he saw nothing. It was only when his brother muttered â€œHum! Hum!â€□ twice and â€œOh! Oh! Oh!â€□ three times that he asked the meaning of those exclamations.

â€œThe meaning,â€□ said Zacharias, â€œis that it would be the devilâ€¦Oh, no! Oh, yes!â€□

â€œThat it would be the devil?â€□ the technician repeated.

â€œYesâ€¦,â€□ the toy dealer continued.

â€œYes, what?â€□ Master Drosselmayer asked.

Instead of replying, Zacharias, who, during all these broken questions and answers, had most likely been gathering his memories, now hurled his periwig into the air and started dancing and shouting: â€œBrother, you are saved! Brother, you wonâ€™t go to prison! Brother, unless Iâ€™m awfully mistaken, I am the owner of Krakatuk Nut!â€□

And, offering his flabbergasted brother no further explanation, Christophe-Zacharias dashed out of the apartment and then came back an instant later with a box containing a big gilded filbert, which he presented to the technician.

The latter, not daring to believe in so much good fortune, took the nut hesitantly, turning it every which way and examining it with the care that it deserved. After that inspection, the technician stated that he agreed with his brother, and that heâ€™d be quite astonished if the filbert werenâ€™t Krakatuk Nut. He passed it on to the astrologer, asking his opinion.

After examining the filbert no less attentively than Master Drosselmayer had done, the astrologer shook his head and replied:

â€œI would share your opinion and, by consequence, your brotherâ€™s opinion if the filbert werenâ€™t gilded. Nowhere in the stars have I found that the fruit we are seeking should be clad in this adornment. Besides, how did you come to possess Krakatuk Nut in the first place?â€□

â€œLet me explain,â€□ said Zacharius, â€œhow the Nut fell into my hands, and why it has this gilt, which prevents you from recognizing it, and which is certainly not natural to it.â€□

He then had the two visitors sit down, for he quite judiciously figured that they were bound to be tired after a trek of fourteen years and nine months. And then the toy dealer began his account:

â€œThe same day on which the king summoned you under the pretext of giving you the cross, a stranger arrived in Nuremberg, carrying a sack of nuts that he planned to sell. However, the local nut merchants, who wanted to preserve their monopoly, picked a fight with him, right outside the door to their shop.

â€œTrying to defend himself more easily, the stranger put his sack on the ground. The battle wore on, much to the satisfaction of the street urchins and the commissioners, when an overloaded wagon rolled across the sack of nuts. Seeing this accident, which they attributed to divine justice, the local merchants felt sufficiently avenged and they left the stranger alone. The stranger collected the nuts, and, indeed, all of them were crushedâ€”except for one, which he presented to

me with a singular grin. He urged me to buy that nut for a new twenty-ducat piece minted in 1720, promising that eventually I would no longer be angry about this purchase, so onerous as it might strike me at the moment. I dug through my pocket and I was very surprised to find a twenty-ducat piece quite similar to the one the stranger was requesting of me. The coincidence was so bizarre that I handed him my twenty-ducat piece, he handed me the Nut, and he disappeared.

â€œI put the Nut up for sale, and even though I was asking for the price it had cost me, plus two kreutzers, it remained on display for seven or eight years; but I could find no buyers. I therefore decided to have it gilded in order to raise its value. But I merely wasted two more twenty-ducat pieces. Until today, the Nut has still found no takers.â€□

At that moment, the astrologer, who was holding the Nut, shrieked for joy! During Master Drosselmayerâ€™s discourse to his brother, the astrologer, using a penknife, had delicately scraped the gilt on the Nut, and, in a tiny corner of the shell, he had found the name Krakatuk engraved in Chinese characters.

There could no longer be any doubt! The identity of the Nut was acknowledged.

How, after finding Krakatuk Nut, the technician had also found the young man who was supposed to crack it

Christian-Elias Drosselmayer was so eager to bring the good news to the king that he wanted to climb into the return coach immediately. But Christophe-Zacharias asked him to at least wait until the toy dealerâ€™s son came home. The technician was all the more anxious to honor this request since he hadnâ€™t seen his nephew for fifteen years. In gathering his memories, he recalled that when he, the uncle, had left Nuremberg, the nephew had been a charming little boy of three and a half, whom Elias loved with all his heart.

At that instant, a handsome young man of eighteen or nineteen stepped into the shop and approached the toy dealer, addressing him as â€œFather.â€□

After embracing him, Zacharias introduced him to Elias, saying to the young man: â€œNow hug your uncle!â€□

The young man hesitated. There was absolutely nothing appealing about Uncle Drosselmayer, with his bald head, his eye patch, and his tattered frock coat. But since the father noticed his sonâ€™s hesitation, he was afraid that Elias would be offended. He therefore pushed his son, so that, for better or worse, the young man landed in his uncleâ€™s arms.

Meanwhile, the astrologer was focusing his eyes on the young man, with a continuous attention that appeared so bizarre that he seized upon the first pretext to leave. Being gaped at like that made him ill at ease.

The astrologer asked Zacharias for a few details about his son, and the father readily complied with a thoroughly paternal verbosity.

As his face indicated, young Drosselmayer was seventeen or eighteen years old. From his earliest childhood, he was so funny and so gentle that his mother enjoyed dressing him like the dolls in the shopâ€”that is, like a student or a postilion or a Hungarian. Moreover, it was always a costume that required boots. For, since he had the loveliest feet in the world but slightly thin calves, the boots emphasized the quality and concealed any defects.

â€œAnd so,â€□ the astrologer asked Zacharias, â€œyour son has never worn anything but boots?â€□

Eliasâ€™s eyes opened wide.

â€œMy son has never worn anything but boots,â€□ the toy dealer repeated. He then went on: â€œAt the age of ten, I sent him to the University of TÃ¼bingen, where he remained until he turned eighteen without developing any of the bad habits of his fellow students, without drinking, without cursing, without fighting. His sole weakness is that he lets four or five bad hairs grow on his chin and he refuses to let a barber touch his face.â€□

â€œAnd so,â€□ the astrologer replied, â€œyour son has never shaved his face? â€□

Eliasâ€™s eyes opened wider and wider.

â€œNever!â€□ Zacharias responded.

â€œWhat about vacations?â€□ the astrologer continued. â€œHow did he spend his time?â€□

â€œHe stayed in my shop, sporting his pretty little student costume,â€□ said the father, â€œand, out of sheer gallantry, he cracked nuts for girls who came to buy toys and who nicknamed him Nutcracker.â€□

â€œNutcracker?â€□ the technician exclaimed.

â€œNutcracker?â€□ the astrologer echoed.

The two of them exchanged glances while Zacharias looked at both of them.

â€œMy dear sir,â€□ the astrologer said to Zacharias, â€œI do believe youâ €™ve made your fortune.â€□

The toy dealer, who was not indifferent to that forecast, wanted an explanation. But the astrologer said they would have to wait until the next morning.

When the technician and the astrologer reentered their chamber, the astrologer threw his arms around his friend, saying: â€œItâ€™s him! Weâ€™ve got him!â€□

â€œDo you think so?â€□ Elias asked in the tone of a man who doubts but who wishes nothing better than to be convinced.

â€œGoodness! If I think so? He seems to have all the qualities.â€□

â€œRecapitulate.â€□

â€œHe has never worn anything but boots.â€□

â€œThatâ€™s true.â€□

â€œHe has never been shaved.â€□

â€œThatâ€™s true, too.â€□

â€œFinally, through gallantry or rather by vocation, he stayed in his fatherâ €™s shop in order to crack nuts for girls who only called him Nutcracker.â€□

â€œThatâ€™s true, too.â€□

â€œMy dear friend, all good things come in pairs. Anyway: if youâ€™re still skeptical, letâ€™s go and consult the stars.â€□

They went up to the terrace of the house. Casting the young manâ€™s horoscope, they saw that he was destined for a great future. This prediction, confirming all the hopes of the astrologer, compelled the technician to submit to his opinion.

â€œAnd now,â€□ said the triumphant astrologer, â€œthere are only two things we should not neglect.â€□

â€œWhat are they?â€□ asked Elias.

â€œFirst of all, we have to adjust a tough wooden plait to the back of your nephewâ€™s neckâ€”a plait working so well with the jaw that the pressure can double the force.â€□

â€œNothing could be simpler,â€□ Elias replied. â€œThatâ€™s the ABC of mechanics.â€□

â€œSecondly,â€□ the astrologer continued, â€œwhen we arrive at the residence, we have to carefully hide the fact that we have brought along the young man who is destined to smash Krakatuk Nut. I believe that the more broken teeth and the more dislocated jaws result from efforts to crack Krakatuk Nut, the more likely the king will be to offer a gigantic reward to the man who succeeds where so many others have failed.â€□

â€œMy dear friend,â€□ the technician responded, â€œyou are a man of good common sense. Letâ€™s go to bed.â€□

Leaving the terrace and returning to their chamber, the two friends went to bed. They tied their cotton bonnets around their ears and then slept more peacefully than they had ever done in the past fourteen years and nine months.

The next morning, the two friends went to Zacharias and told him about all the wonderful plans they had forged the night before. Now, Zacharias did not lack ambition, and so his paternal ego was flattered that his son should have one of the most powerful jaws in Germany. He therefore enthusiastically accepted the arrangement that took not only Nut but also Nutcracker from his shop.

It was harder convincing the young man. He was especially worried about the plait that was to be applied to the back of his neck in lieu of the elegant purse, which he carried so gracefully. However, the astrologer, as well as the uncle and the father, made him such marvelous promises that he finally gave in. And since Elias Drosselmayer got to work instantly, the plait was soon finished and then tightly screwed into the back of the neck of this hopeful young man. To satisfy the curiosity of our readers, we must hasten to add that this ingenious apparatus succeeded perfectly, and that, from the very outset, our skillful technician obtained the most brilliant results with the toughest and most obstinate pits of apricots and peaches.

After these experiences, the astrologer, the technician, and the young Drosselmayer immediately started out for the residence. Zacharias would have liked to accompany them, but since somebody had to guard the shop, this excellent father sacrificed himself and remained in Nuremberg.

The End of the Tale of Princess Pirlipat

When the travelers arrived, their first concern was to install young Drosselmayer at the inn while the two friends went to the palace to announce that, after searching fruitlessly through the four continents, they had finally tracked down Krakatuk Nut in Nuremberg. But, as they had agreed, they didnâ€™t breathe a word about the man who was to crack it.

There was great joy in the palace. The king promptly summoned his privy councilor, the guardian of public feeling, who kept supreme control over all newspapers. The ruler ordered the councilor to write an official note for the Royal Monitorâ€”a note that other newspaper editors would be forced to repeat. In substance, it would say that any man who believed his teeth were strong enough to crack Krakatuk Nut need merely present himself at the palace. If the operation succeeded, he would receive a generous reward.

Only in a comparable circumstance can we appreciate how many jaws are to be found in a kingdom. There were so many applicants that the authorities were

obliged to establish a jury presided over by the Crown Dentist, who examined the contestants to see if they had their thirty-two teeth and to make sure that no tooth was decayed.

Three thousand five hundred candidates were admitted to the first test, which lasted a week, resulting only in an indefinite number of broken teeth and cracked mandibles.

So they decided to make a second appeal. The domestic and foreign gazettes were covered with ads. The king offered the position of lifetime chairman of the Academy and the Order of the Golden Spider to the upper jaw that would smash Krakatuk Nut. Literacy was not required.

This second test drew five thousand applicants. All the learned associations sent their representatives to this important congress. Several members of the French Academy could be spotted, among others, with its lifetime secretary. The latter was unable to compete because of the absence of his teeth, which he had broken while trying to rip up the works of his colleagues.

The second test, which lasted for two weeks, wasâ€”alas!â€”even more disastrous than the first. The delegates of scholarly bodies, among others, stubbornly insisted on trying to crack Nut for the honor of their learned societies. But all they accomplished was to leave their best teeth behind them.

As for Nut, its shell didnâ€™t show even a single trace of the efforts to penetrate it.

The king was in despair. He resolved to make a dramatic move. Since he had no male descendant, he published a third ad in all domestic and foreign gazettes. The new ad said that whoever cracked Krakatuk Nut would be granted the hand of Princess Pirlipat and the succession to the throne. The sole condition was that the contender had to be between sixteen and twenty-four years old.

The guarantee of that reward moved the whole of Germany. The candidates came from every corner of Europe. Indeed, they would also have come from Asia, Africa, and America as well as from the fifth continent, which had been discovered by Elias Drosselmayer and his friend the astrologer. But their time was limited. The readers could have judiciously reflected that only when they read the ad, the test could have already commenced or already finished.

This time, the technician and the astrologer felt that the moment had come for them to produce young Drosselmayer, for the king could not have supplied a higher prize or a more wonderful reward. The two travelers were confident about their success even though a throng of princes with royal or imperial jaws had arrived. The two friends, however, did not register with the Bureau of Inscriptions (you are free to confuse the Bureau of Inscriptions with the Bureau of Belles Lettres) until right before it closed. The name Nathaniel Drosselmayer was the 11,375th and it was the final name on the list.

Their efforts were all the same. Nathaniel Drosselmayerâ€™s 11,374 competitors were disabled. And on the nineteenth day of the test, at 11:35 A.M., just as the princess was completing her fifteenth year, the name Nathaniel Drosselmayer was called out. The young man presented himself, accompanied by his two godfathersâ€”the technician and the astrologer.

This was the first time these two illustrious personages had seen the princess since leaving the side of her cradle. Since then, she had undergone tremendous changes. But, to be perfectly frank as a historian, the changes had not been to her advantage. When the two friends had left her, she had been merely awful. But now she had become dreadful.

Her body had grown a lot but with no weight. Nor could one understand how these skinny legs, these feeble hips, this shriveled torso could support that monstrous head. That head was made up of the same bristly hair, the same green eyes, the same immense mouth, the same fluffy chin, except that everything was fifteen years older. Upon seeing this hideous freak, poor Nathaniel shuddered and he asked the technician and the astrologer whether they were absolutely certain that the meat of Krakatuk Nut would restore the princessâ€™s beauty. If she remained in her present state, Nathaniel was willing to take the test for the glory of succeeding where so many others had failed. But he would leave the honor of marriage and the benefit of succession to the throne to whoever would care to accept them. Needless to say, the technician and the astrologer assured their godson that once Nut was cracked and its meat was eaten, Pirlipat would instantly revert to being the most beautiful princess on earth.

But, if the sight of the princess had frozen poor Nathanielâ€™s heart, we must say in his honor that his presence had produced the very opposite effect on the sensitive heart of the successor to the crown. And she couldnâ€™t help exclaiming: â€œOh! I hope that heâ€™s the man who cracks Nut!â€

To which the Supervisor of the Princessâ€™s Education retorted: â€œI must point out to Your Highness that it is not customary for a young and lovely princess like yourself to voice her opinion in such matters.â€

Now, Nathaniel was appealing enough to turn the heads of all the princesses in the world. He sported a short, violet velvet polonaise with frogs and loops as well as gold buttons, a garment that his uncle had ordered for this solemn occasion. Nathaniel also wore similar culottes, plus charming little boots, which were so snug and well polished that they looked painted. It was only that miserable wooden pigtail screwed in his nape that slightly marred the ensemble. But, by inserting extension pieces, Uncle Drosselmayer had provided the shape of a small cape, which, in a pinch, could pass for a vagary of Nathanielâ€™s wardrobe, or for some new fashion that his tailor, given the circumstance, was trying to introduce at court very gently.

And so, watching the young and charming little man enter the court, the princessâ€™s ladies-in-waiting very softly murmured to one another the words that the princess had been imprudent enough to voice out loud. Nor was there a single person, not even the king and the queen, who did not wish at the bottom of their hearts that Nathaniel would carry the day.

Young Drosselmayer approached the royal family with a self-confidence that doubled the hopes of the well-wishers. Arriving in front of the royal rostrum, he bowed to the king and the queen, then to the princess, then to the ladies-in-waiting. Next, the Grand Master of Ceremony handed him Krakatuk Nut, which the young man took delicately between his index and his thumb, like a conjuror playing with his vanishing ball. He then inserted Nut into his mouth, violently punched the wooden plait, andâ€”Crack! Crack!â€”he crushed the shell into several pieces. Next, he skillfully slipped the kernel out of the attached filaments and presented it to the princess, drawing a both elegant and respectful metal doormat. After that, he shut his eyes and began walking backward.

As soon as the princess swallowed the nut meatâ€”Oh, miracle!â€”the deformed monster vanished and was replaced by a girl of angelic beauty. Her face seemed woven out of silk flakes as rosy as roses and as white as lilies. Her eyes were a sparkling azure, and the abundant curls formed by gold threads tumbled down over her alabaster shoulders.

The trumpets blared and the cymbals clangedâ€”to beat the band! The joyful shouts of the people responded to the clamor of the instruments. Like at Pirlipatâ €™s birth, the king, the ministers, the councilors, and the judges began dancing and hopping, and they had to sprinkle cologne on the face of the queen, who had fainted in sheer delight. This huge tumult troubled young Drosselmayer, who, we recall, had to take those seven paces backward in order to complete his mission.

Still, he pulled himself together with a power that inspired the greatest hopes for the time when he himself would be ruling. He was just extending his leg for the seventh pace when, all at once, Mouse Queen pierced through the floor, squealing horribly as she scurried between the legs of the future crown prince. At that moment, he lowered his heel right into Mouse Queen, which caused him to stagger and very nearly fall.

Oh! Fatality! The handsome young man was instantly as malformed as the princess had been before him. His legs were skinny, his shriveled body could barely support his enormous and repulsive head. His eyes were green, haggard, and bulging. Finally, his mouth was split from ear to ear, and his pretty little burgeoning beard changed into a soft, white material that was later identified as cotton.

However, the offender who caused this turn of events was punished even as she caused it. Lady Mouserink bled and twisted on the floor. Thus her evil did not go unpenalized. Indeed, young Drosselmayerâ€™s boot heel had pressed her so violently against the floor that the crush was mortal. As she lay there, twisting and writhing, she exclaimed with all the strength of her agonizing voice:

Krakatuk! Krakatuk! Oh, Nut so hard!

It is to you I owe the death I endure.

Heeheeheeheeâ€¦

But the future will hold my revenge:

My son will even the score, Nutcracker.

Teeteeteeteeâ€¦

Farewell, life,

Taken too soon!

Farewell, sky,

Cup of honey!

Farewell, world,

Fertile source!

Ah, I am dying!

Heeheetee! See!

Lady Mouserinkâ€™s final breath may not have been so well rhymed. But if one is allowed a single fault in this versification, it isâ€”we agreeâ€”in rendering the final sigh.

Once the final sigh was rendered, they summoned the Grand Royal Felt Maker. He picked Lady Mouserink up by her tail and carried her away, promising to unite her with the unhappy remnants of her family, who, fifteen years and several months ago, had been buried in a mass grave.

Meanwhile, no one but the technician and the astrologer had focused on Nathaniel Drosselmayer. The princess, unaware of his condition, ordered her servants to bring her the young hero. Despite the rebukes of the Supervisor for Education, she was eager to thank Nathaniel. But no sooner did she set eyes on him than she buried her face in her hands and, forgetting his service to her, she exclaimed:

â€œGet out! Get out! You terrible Nutcracker! Get out! Get out!â€□

The grand marshal of the palace instantly grabbed poor Nathanielâ€™s shoulders and pushed him down the stairs.

The king, furious that they had dared to propose a Nutcracker as his son-in-law, blamed the astrologer and the technician. He refused to grant the astrologer the pension of ten thousand ducats, plus the Telescope of Honor. And he refused to award the technician the diamond-studded sword, plus the Royal Order of the Golden Spider and the yellow frock coat. Instead of all those prizes that he owed them, the king exiled both men from his kingdom, allowing them a mere twenty-four hours to reach the border. They had to obey. The technician, the astrologer, and young Drosselmayer (now Nutcracker) left the capital and crossed the border.

At nightfall, however, the two savants consulted the stars again and they read in their conjunction that, albeit deformed, their godson would nevertheless become prince and then king, unless he preferred remaining a private citizenâ€”that would be totally up to him. It would come about when his malformation disappeared, and his malformation would disappear once he commanded his side of a battle. This conflict would claim the life of Mouse Prince, whom, after the deaths of her first seven sons, Lady Mouserink had borne with seven heads. And this prince was the current Mouse King. Finally, despite his ugliness, Nutcracker would have to gain the love of a pretty lady.

While awaiting these brilliant destinies, Nathaniel Drosselmayer, who had left his fatherâ€™s boutique as an only child, reentered it as Nutcracker. Needless to say, his father didnâ€™t recognize him at all. And when he asked the technician and the astrologer about his son, these two illustrious personages replied with the composure that characterizes scholars. They explained that the king and the queen had refused to let the princessâ€™s savior leave, so that young Nathaniel had remained at court, overwhelmed with glory and honor.

As for unhappy Nutcracker, who felt everything that was distressing about his position, he didnâ€™t breathe a word. He was waiting for the change that was bound to occur in him. Still, despite the gentleness of his nature and the stoicism of his mind, we must admit that, at the very bottom of his enormous mouth, he kept one of his uncleâ€™s biggest teeth. Seeking the young man at the very moment that he least expected him to be, and inveigled by his marvelous promises, Drosselmayer was the one and only cause of the horrible misfortune that had befallen him.

Well, my dear children, there you have the tale of Krakatuk Nut and Princess Pirlipat, as recounted by Godfather Drosselmayer to little Marie. And now you know why we say about a difficult thing:

â€œThatâ€™s a hard nut to crack.â€

The Uncle and the Nephew

If any of my readers, girls or boys, had ever cut themselves on broken glass, which they might have done on their days of disobedience, they must know from experience that this is a particularly unpleasant cut because it takes forever to heal. Marie was therefore compelled to spend an entire week in bed, for she felt dizzy whenever she tried to stand up. In the end, she was completely cured and she could skip around the room as she had done before the accident.

Either we are unjust toward our little heroine or we can easily understand why her first visit was at the glass cabinet. It looked absolutely charming: The broken pane had been replaced, and behind the other panes, scrupulously cleaned by Mademoiselle Trudchen, the trees, the houses, and the dolls of the new year appeared, fresh, brilliant, and polished. But, among all the treasures of her juvenile realm, and before anything else, what stood out for Marie was her Nutcracker. He smiled at her from the second shelf, and his teeth were in as good a state as they had ever been.

As Marie happily contemplated her favorite, a certain thought, which had already occurred to her several times, now made her heart sink. She figured that everything her godfather had related was no fairy tale. It was all a history of Nutcrackerâ€™s quarrels with the late Mouse Queen and her son, the prince regnant. Marie therefore realized that Nutcracker could be none other than young Drosselmayer of Nuremberg, her godfatherâ€™s pleasant but spellbound nephew. Nor could the ingenious technician of the king, Pirlipatâ€™s father, be anyone but Drosselmayer. She had never doubted it for even a second once his yellow frock coat had surfaced in the narrative. And her conviction had deepened when she saw that he had lost his hair because of sunstroke, and his eye because of an arrow. The latter had necessitated the fabrication of the dreadful eye patch and the former her invention of the inspired glass periwig, which we talked about at the beginning of this account.

â€œBut why didnâ€™t your uncle help you, poor Nutcracker?â€ said Marie in front of the glass cabinet. Looking at her protÃ©gÃ©, she considered that the disenchantment of that poor little fellow depended on their victory in the battle. His elevation to the rank of monarch over the kingdom of dolls marked these dolls as being ready to submit to his authority. Marie recalled that during the combat the dolls had obeyed Nutcracker just as soldiers obey a general. Her godfatherâ€™s indifference caused her all the more pain in that she was positive that these dolls, to whom her imagination gave life and movement, actually lived and moved.

However, things were different in the glass cabinet, at least initially. Everything was tranquil and immobile. Yet, rather than renouncing her inner conviction, Marie attributed all those things to the spell cast by the Mouse Queen and her son. The little girl was involved so deeply in her sentiment that, albeit watching Nutcracker, she soon continued to tell him aloud what she had started to tell him very softly.

â€œStill,â€□ Marie went on, â€œeven if youâ€™re unable to move or just to breathe the slightest word because of the spell, Iâ€™m certain, my dear Herr Drosselmayer, that you understand me perfectly. In fact, you are well aware of my intentions toward you. So please count on my support if you need it. Meanwhile, keep calm. Iâ€™m going to ask your uncle to help you. He is so adroit that we have to hope heâ€™ll come to your aid, as slightly as he may care for you.â€□

Despite Marieâ€™s eloquence, Nutcracker didnâ€™t budge. However, a sigh appeared to pass very softly across the glass cabinet while the panes began reverberating very gently. The sounds were so miraculously tender that Marie felt as if a voice as sweet as a small silver chime were saying: â€œDear little Marie, my guardian angel. Iâ€™ll be yours, Marie, all yours.â€□

Hearing those mysterious words, Marie, across a thrill that shot through her entire body, felt overwhelmed by a singular well-being.

Meantime, twilight had set in. The judge entered together with Drosselmayer. Mademoiselle Trudchen had laid out the tea service in the twinkling of an eye, and the entire family sat down around the table. Everyone was chatting merrily. As for Marie, she had taken hold of her little armchair and had wordlessly settled at her godfatherâ€™s feet. Then, in an instant when everybody happened to be silent, Marie raised her big, blue eyes and stared at her godfatherâ€™s face.

â€œNow I know, dear Godfather,â€□ she said, â€œthat my Nutcracker is your nephew, young Drosselmayer of Nuremberg. He became the prince and the king of the kingdom of dolls, as was so accurately forecast by your companion, the astrologer. But you do know that the nephew is involved in fierce open warfare with Mouse King. Honestly, dear Godfather, why didnâ€™t you come to his aid when you were an owl mounted on the clock? And why are you still abandoning him even now?â€□

At these words, Marie once again described the famous battle that she had witnessed. She spoke amid the laughter of her father, her mother, and Mademoiselle Trudchen. The only ones who frowned were Fritz and Godfather.

â€œJust where,â€□ said the godfather, â€œdoes this little girl find all the silly things that occur to her?â€□

â€œShe has a very lively imagination,â€□ said the mother. â€œThese are basically dreams and visions created by her fever.â€□

â€œAnd the proof,â€□ said Fritz, â€œis that she says my Red Hussars fled the battle, which couldnâ€™t be further from the truthâ€”unless theyâ€™re abominable cowards. In which caseâ€”darn it all!â€”theyâ€™d be risking nothing, and Iâ€™d knock them silly!â€□

With a bizarre grin, Godfather Drosselmayer took little Marie on his lap and spoke more gently than before:

â€œDear child, you donâ€™t realize what path youâ€™re choosing if you so heatedly take up Nutcrackerâ€™s interests? Youâ€™ll have to endure a lot of suffering if you continue siding with the poor, disgraced candidate. You see, Mouse King considers him his motherâ€™s killer and heâ€™ll persecute him by all possible means. In any case, itâ€™s not I, do you hear, itâ€™s only you who can save him. Be firm and loyal, and it will all work out for the best.â€□

Neither Marie nor anyone else grasped a single bit of that discourse. Furthermore, it sounded so outlandish to the judge that he wordlessly took hold of the medical counselor and, after checking his pulse, he said: â€œMy dear friend, youâ€™ve got a high fever. I advise you to go to bed.â€□

The Capital

During the night after the scene that we have just described, the moon was shining with all its power, slipping a light ray between the twisted curtains of the chamber. Little Marie, sleeping near her mother, was awakened by a noise that seemed to come from a corner and was punctuated by sharp hissing and prolonged squealing.

â€œAlas!â€ exclaimed Marie, who had heard those noises during the famous evening of the battle. â€œAlas! The mice are coming back, Mama, Mama, Mama!â€ But no matter how strenuous her efforts, her voice faded in her mouth. She tried to leave, but she couldnâ€™t move her arms and legsâ€”she appeared virtually nailed to her bed. Turning her horrified eyes to the corner from which the noise was coming, Marie saw Mouse King scratching himself a passage through the wall, making the hole bigger and bigger. First one of his heads poked out, then two, then three, until finally all seven heads, each one crowned. After touring the room several times, like a conqueror taking possession of his conquest, Mouse King leaped up to little Marieâ€™s nightstand. There, he gazed at the girl with his carbuncle eyes, whistling and grinding his teeth while talking:

â€œHee hee hee! You have to give me your sugar pills and your marzipan cookies, little girl. Otherwise Iâ€™ll devour your friend Nutcracker!â€ After voicing that threat, Mouse King escaped through his hole.

Marie was so terrified by the dreadful apparition that when she awoke in the morning, she had a pale face and a heavy heartâ€”and even more so because she didnâ€™t dare describe what she had experienced that night. She was afraid the others would make fun of her. The account reached her lips twenty times, regarding either her mother or her brother. But she caught herself every time. She was still convinced that neither would believe her. However, what struck her the most clearly in this confusion was that she would have to sacrifice her sugar pills and marzipan cookies in order to save Nutcracker. That same evening, she put all her sweets on the edge of the cabinet.

The next morning, the judgeâ€™s wife said: â€œHonestly, I donâ€™t know where all these mice are coming fromâ€”bursting into our home! Just look, my poor Marie,â€ she went on, taking the little girl into the parlor. â€œThose nasty beasts have gobbled up all the goodies!â€

The judgeâ€™s wife was making a mistake. Instead of â€œgobbled up,â€ she ought to have said â€œspoiled.â€ For this gourmand, Mouse King, didnâ€™t much care for marzipan. He had just nibbled the cookies so thoroughly that they had to be thrown away.

Moreover, since it wasnâ€™t bonbons either that Marie preferred, she didnâ€™t truly regret the sacrifice demanded of her by Mouse King. Believing heâ€™d be satisfied with that first contribution, she was delighted that she had gotten Nutcracker off so easily.

Unfortunately, her enjoyment did not last. That night, she was awoken by squeals and hisses.

Alas! It was Mouse King again, his eyes sparkling more horribly than in the previous night. And in the same voice, mixed with squeals and hisses, he said to Marie: â€œYou have to give me your sugar dolls and your biscuit dolls, little girl. Otherwise Iâ€™ll devour your friend Nutcracker.â€

And the Mouse King scurried away and vanished through his hole.

The next morning, Marie, who was terribly distressed, headed straight for the glass cabinet. With a mournful gaze, she surveyed her sugar dolls and her biscuit dolls. Her pain was certainly natural, for nobody had ever seen such a little girl with such a big sweet tooth.

â€œAlas!â€□ said little Marie, turning toward Nutcracker. â€œDear Herr Drosselmayer, what wouldnâ€™t I do to save you! But youâ€™ll agree that the demand made on me is quite harsh.â€□

Nutcracker now looked so lamentable that Marie, who believed she saw Mouse Kingâ€™s jaw open in order to devour Nutcracker, resolved to make this sacrifice, too, in order to save the unhappy young man. That same evening, she therefore placed her sugar dolls and her biscuit dolls on the edge of the cabinet just as she had placed her sugar pills and marzipan cookies there the previous night. But, by way of saying farewell, Marie kissed her dolls each in turnâ€”her shepherds, her shepherdesses, and their sheep. And behind the herd, there was a puffy-cheeked baby whom Marie particularly liked.

â€œThis is too much!â€□ the judgeâ€™s wife cried out the next morning. â€œSome awful mice must have established their domicile in the glass cabinet. Theyâ€™ve devoured all of poor Marieâ€™s dolls.â€□

Thick tears welled up from Marieâ€™s eyes, but they dried up almost instantly, giving way to a gentle smile, for she told herself: â€œWho cares about shepherds, shepherdesses, and sheep? Nutcracker is saved!â€□

â€œBut,â€□ said Fritz, who had had a pensive air about him throughout the conversation, â€œlet me remind you, dear Mama, that the baker has an excellent gray legation adviserâ€”a cat. We can find him, and he can soon put an end to this business by munching the mice one after the other, and after the mice Lady Mouserink herself, and Mouse King as well as his royal mother.â€□

â€œFine,â€□ replied the judgeâ€™s wife, â€œbut the legation adviser is going to jump on the tables and the fireplace mantels and shatter my cups and my glasses.â€□

â€œOh, come on!â€□ said Fritz. â€œThereâ€™s no danger! The bakerâ€™s legation adviser is too skillful to commit such blunders. I wish I could walk on the edges of gutters and the ridges of roofs as solidly and proficiently as he does.â€□

â€œNo cats in the house! No cats here!â€□ cried the judgeâ€™s wife, who couldnâ€™t stand cats.

â€œBut,â€□ said the judge, drawn by the noise, â€œthere was something helpful in what Herr Fritz has stated: Instead of a cat, we can use mousetraps.â€□

â€œGoodness!â€□ exclaimed Fritz. â€œTheyâ€™re very welcome here since Godfather Drosselmayer invented the mousetrap.â€□

Everyone burst out laughing. Now after a narrow search of the entire house, they decided that no such implement existed here. So they sent to the godfatherâ€™s home for an outstanding mousetrap, which was enticed by a piece of bacon and put in the very place where the mice had wrought so much havoc the preceding night.

Marie went to bed, hoping that in the morning, Mouse King would be found in the trap box to which his greediness would lead him. But, around eleven P.M., when Marie was drifting into her early sleep, she was awoken by something cold and hairy that was hopping about on her arms and her face. At the same instant, the squealing and hissing that she was thoroughly familiar with reverberated in her ears. Dreadful Mouse King was there, on her bolster, his eyes scintillating with a gory flame, and his seven mouths open as if he were about to devour poor Marie.

â€œI thumb my nose! I thumb my nose!â€□ said Mouse King. â€œI wonâ€™t enter the small box. Your bacon doesnâ€™t tempt me! I wonâ€™t be caught! I thumb my nose! But you have to give me your picture books and your petite silk gown. Otherwise, watch out! Iâ€™ll devour your Nutcracker.â€□

We can understand why, after such a demand, Marie woke up in the morning with her soul full of pain and her eyes full of tears. Thus her mother told her nothing new when she informed her that the trap was useless, and that Mouse King must have suspected some kind of trap. Next, when the mother left to take care of preparations for breakfast, Marie stepped into the salon and, heading toward the glass cabinet, she sobbed:

â€œAlas, my good and dear Herr Drosselmayer! Where is he going to stop? When Iâ€™ve given Mouse King my lovely picture books to tear up and my beautiful petite silk gown to rip apartâ€”the gown the Infant Jesus gave me for Christmasâ€”Mouse King still wonâ€™t be content. Heâ€™ll require something new every day. And once I have nothing more to give him, he may devour me in your stead. Alas! Poor child that I am, what should I do, my good and dear Herr Drosselmayer? What should I do?â€□

Amid her weeping and lamenting, Marie noticed that Nutcracker had a drop of blood on his neck. The day on which Marie had learned that her protÃ©gÃ© was the toy dealerâ€™s son, and the medical counselorâ€™s nephew, she had stopped carrying Nutcracker in her arms. She had no longer caressed or embraced him. Indeed her shyness toward him was so great that she hadnâ€™t even dared to touch him with a fingertip.

But at this moment, seeing he was hurt, and fearing his injury might be dangerous, Marie carefully removed him from the glass cabinet and wiped that blood away with her handkerchief. Now what was her amazement when she abruptly felt Nutcracker beginning to stir in her hand! His mouth slashed to the right and to the left, which made it look even bigger and, with great difficulty, he finished his movements, articulating these words:

â€œAh! My very dear FrÃ¤ulein Silberhaus, my excellent friend! How much do I owe you, and how grateful must I be to you! Do not sacrifice your picture books and your silk gown for my sake. Just get me a sword, a good sword, and Iâ€™ll take care of the rest!â€□

Nutcracker wanted to keep talking, but his speech grew unintelligible, his voice faded completely, and his eyes, briefly animated by the most tender melancholy, were now immobile and lackluster.

Marie felt no terror. Quite the opposite: She jumped for joy, delighted as she was that she could save Nutcracker without sacrificing her picture books and her silk gown. Only one thing worried her. She had to know where to find the good sword that the little fellow was asking for.

The little girl decided to unburden herself and describe her problems to Fritz, who, apart from his braggadocio, was, as she knew, an obliging boy. She therefore took him to the glass cabinet and told him about everything that had happened to her with Nutcracker and Mouse King. Marie ended her account by informing Fritz what service she expected of him. The only thing to make an impact on Fritz was the fact that his Hussars had actually lacked courage in the thick of battle. He asked Marie if the accusation was true, and she affirmed that it ***was*** true. Now since he knew the little girl to be incapable of lying, he reached into the cabinet and gave a long speech, which seemed to inspire a great shame.

And that wasnâ€™t all. To punish the entire regiment with their leaders as proxies, he lowered the rank of each and every officer one by one. He also ordered

the trumpeters not to play the march â€œHussars of the Guardâ€□ for a whole year. Then, turning to Marie, he said:

â€œAs for Nutcracker, he seems to be a decent boy, and I think I can help him get a sword. Yesterday I cashiered an old major of the Cuirassiersâ€”with his pension, of course. He had completed his hitch and so I assume he no longer needs his saber, which has an excellent blade.â€□

Next they had to track down the major and they found him squandering the pension that Fritz had awarded him. The major was at a small, far-flung inn at the most out-of-the-way nook of the third shelf of the cabinet. As Fritz had assumed, the major didnâ€™t cause any problems in handing over his saber, which was now useless for him.

That night, Marie couldnâ€™t fall asleep. She was so wide awake that she could hear the twelve strokes emitted by the clock in the salon. Scarcely had the vibrations of the last stroke faded when bizarre noises resounded from the cabinet, and the clashing of swords made it seem as if two fierce adversaries were facing each other. Suddenly, one of the combatants squealed.

â€œMouse King!â€□ exclaimed Marie, both joyful and terrified.

At first, nothing budged. But then somebody tapped softly, very softly, and a harmonious voice spoke:

â€œMy very dear Mademoiselle Silberhaus, I am bringing you some wonderful news! Please open the door, I beg you!â€□

Marie recognized young Drosselmayerâ€™s voice. She slipped into her little gown and briskly opened the door. There was Nutcracker, his left hand clutching a blood-stained saber, his right hand gripping a candle. Upon seeing Marie, he knelt before her and said:

â€œYou alone, Mademoiselle, animated me with the chivalrous courage that I have just deployed. You also gave my arm the strength to fight the insolent creature who dared to threaten you. That miserable Mouse King is now bathing in his own blood. Please, Mademoiselle, would you disdain the trophies of victory, which are offered by a knight who will be devoted to you until his last breath?â€□

Nutcracker removed Mouse Kingâ€™s seven gold crowns from his left arm, having worn them as bracelets, and he presented them to Marie, who was thrilled to accept them.

Encouraged by this benevolence, Nutcracker stood up and continued:

â€œOh, my dear Demoiselle Silberhaus, now that I have vanquished my enemy, what admirable things could I not show you if you had the gracious condescendence to accompany me for only a few paces? Oh, do it, do it, my dear demoiselle, I beg you.â€□

Marie didnâ€™t waver for even an instant. She followed Nutcracker, knowing that she owed him her gratitude and quite certain that he had no designs on her.

â€œIâ€™ll follow you, my dear Herr Drosselmayer,â€□ she said. â€œBut the trip mustnâ€™t be long and the destination mustnâ€™t be farâ€”you see, I didnâ€™t get enough sleep last night.â€□

â€œThen,â€□ said Nutcracker, â€œIâ€™ll choose the shorter road even though itâ€™s the more difficult one.â€□

Next he walked ahead, followed by Marie.

The two of them soon arrived in front of an old and huge armoire that stood in a corridor right next to the door, serving as a wardrobe. Nutcracker halted. To her great astonishment, Marie noticed that the cabinet leaves, usually shut tight, were wide open. As a result, she had a marvelous view of her fatherâ€™s travel pelisse, a fox skin hanging in front of the other garments. Nutcracker very skillfully climbed up along the edges. With the help of frogs and loops, he managed to reach the great crest, which, attached by a thick braid, hung down the back of the pelisse. Nutcracker promptly drew forth some charming cedar steps, which he arranged in such a way that their base touched the ground while their head vanished inside the sleeve of the pelisse.

â€œAnd now, my dear Mademoiselle,â€□ said Nutcracker, â€œplease be so kind as to give me your hand and go up together with me.â€□

Marie obeyed. And scarcely was she seen through the sleeve than a light sparkled in front of her. Suddenly, she was transported to the middle of a fragrant meadow, which scintillated as if it had been completely strewn with precious stones.

â€œOh, my goodness!â€□ cried Marie, bedazzled. â€œJust where are we, my dear Herr Drosselmayer?â€□

â€œWe are in the Sugar Candy Plain, Mademoiselle. But we wonâ€™t stop off here, if you donâ€™t mind. We will immediately pass through this gate.â€□

Only now did Marie, raising her eyes, notice an admirable gate through which you could leave the plain. The gate seemed to be built out of white marble, red marble, and brown marble. But when Marie drew nearer, she saw that the entire gate was made of preservesâ€”orgeat blossoms, pralines, and currants. That was why, according to Nutcracker, this gate was known as the Praline Gate.

The gate opened upon an immense gallery supported by columns of barley sugar. On top of the gallery, six monkeys clad in red were making musicâ€”if not the most melodious then at least the most original. Marie was in such a hurry to arrive that she didnâ€™t even realize she was walking on a pavement of pistachios and macaroons, which she quite simply mistook for marble.

At last, she reached the end of the gallery, and no sooner was she out in the fresh air than she found herself overpowered by the most delicious perfumes, which emanated from a charming little forest that opened in front of her. This forest, which would have been dark without its countless lights, was so thoroughly illuminated that you could sharply distinguish the gold and silver fruits which were suspended from branches adorned by ribbons and bouquets and similar to those of joyful newlyweds.

â€œOh, my dear Herr Drosselmayer!â€□ cried Marie. â€œPlease tell me! What is this charming place?â€□

â€œWeâ€™re in Christmas Forest, Mademoiselle,â€□ said Nutcracker. â€œThis is where they get the trees on which the Infant Jesus hangs his presents.â€□

â€œOh!â€□ Marie continued. â€œCouldnâ€™t I stop here for a moment? Itâ€™s so comfortable and it smells so good!â€□

Nutcracker applauded, and several shepherds and shepherdesses, huntsmen and huntswomen emerged from the forest. They were so white and delicate that they looked like refined sugar. They were also carrying a lovely easy chair made of chocolate encrusted with angelica. They placed a jujube cushion on the chair and they very cordially urged Marie to sit down.

No sooner was she sitting than, as is customary in operas, the shepherds and shepherdesses, the huntsmen and huntswomen took their positions. They began to dance a delightful ballet accompanied by horns. The huntsmen blew the horns in a

very masculine way that colored their faces so that they looked as if they had made preserves of roses. When the performance was done, they vanished in the bushes.

â€œPlease forgive me, my dear Mademoiselle Silberhaus,â€□ said Nutcracker, giving Marie his hand. â€œForgive me for offering you such a dreadful ballet. These rascals can only keep reiterating the same choreography that theyâ€™ve performed a hundred times. As for the huntsmen, they blew their horns like good-for-nothings. I assure you that Iâ€™ll be dealing with them all. Letâ€™s leave these nobodies and letâ€™s continue our promenade, if you please.â€□

â€œWhy, I find all these things very appealing,â€□ said Marie, accepting Nutcrackerâ€™s invitation. â€œIt strikes me, my dear Herr Drosselmayer, that youâ€™re being unfair to the little dancers.â€□

Nutcracker pouted, which signified: â€œWeâ€™ll see, and your indulgence will be counted in their favor.â€□

They went on, arriving on the banks of a creek that seemed to exhale all the fragrances that filled the air.

â€œThis,â€□ said Nutcracker without even waiting for Marie to question him, â€œis the Orange River. Itâ€™s one of the smallest rivers in the kingdom. Apart from its lovely scents, it canâ€™t be compared to the Lemonade River, which flows into the Southern Sea, which is known as the Punch Sea, and it canâ€™t be compared to Lake Orgeat, which empties into the Northern Sea, which is known as the Almond Milk Sea.â€□

Not far from there lay a small village, in which houses, churches, the presbyteryâ€”in short, everything was brown. However, the roofs were gilded, and the walls were resplendent and encrusted with small pink, blue, and white bonbons.

â€œThatâ€™s Marzipan Hamlet,â€□ said Nutcracker. â€œItâ€™s a genteel hamlet, as you can see, and itâ€™s situated on the Honey Creek. The inhabitants are a pleasant sight to behold, but they are always in a bad mood because they suffer from constant toothaches.

â€œHowever, dear Mademoiselle Silberhaus, we canâ€™t halt at every village and every townlet in the kingdom. To the capital! To the capital!â€□

Nutcracker walked on, still holding Marieâ€™s hand. But he now moved more briskly, for Marie, who was very curious, walked at his side, as light as a bird. After a while, the scent of roses wafted through the air, and everything around them took on a rosy tint. Marie noticed that it was the fragrance and the reflection of a river of attar of roses, which rolled its little waves with a charming melody. Silver swans with gold necklaces glided slowly on the water, crooning the most delicious songs, and this very joyful harmony seemed to make the diamond fish skip around them.

â€œAh!â€□ Marie explained. â€œThis is the lovely river that Godfather Drosselmayer wanted to give me at Christmas, and Iâ€™m the little girl who petted the swans.â€□

The Journey

Nutcracker clapped again, and the river of attar of roses swelled perceptibly. And from its agitated waves, a wagon of seashells emerged. This vehicle, covered with jewels that sparkled in the sun, was drawn by gold dolphins. A dozen charming little Moors, sporting dorado scales on their heads and suits of hummingbird feathers, jumped ashore. And they gently carried first Marie, then Nutcracker, to the vehicle, which began to cross the water.

The sight of Marie on her seashell carriage was, we must admit, a ravishing tableau, comparable to Cleopatraâ€™s voyage up the Cydnus River. Marie was bathed in fragrances as she floated on waves of attar of roses, drawn along by gold dolphins, who reared their heads, launching brilliant sheaves of rosy crystal in the air, then falling back in a rain that ran the gamut of all the colors of the rainbow. Finally, with all the senses imbued with joy, a sweet harmony began to resound, and delicate, silvery voices could be heard singing:

â€œWho is sailing on the river of attar of roses? Is it Queen Mab or Queen Titania? Answer me, you little fish who scintillate under the waves, similar to liquid lightning. Answer me, you graceful swans who glide across the watery surface. Answer me, you colorful birds who fly through the air like hovering flowers.â€

Meanwhile, the dozen little Moors, who had jumped in back of the seashell vehicle, rhythmically shook their small parasols, which were decorated with chimes. The shade cast by these parasols provided a shelter for Marie, who, leaning over the water, smiled at the charming face, which smiled at her from every passing wave.

Thus she forded the river of attar of roses and approached the opposite shore. Then, when the shore was only an oarâ€™s length away, the dozen Moors leaped into the water or on the riverbank. Forming a chain, they carried Marie and Nutcracker on an angelica carpet strewn with peppermint candy.

Next, they had to pass through a small grove, which was perhaps even lovelier than Christmas Forest, whereby each tree shimmered and sparkled with its own essence. But most remarkable of all were the fruits hanging from the various branches. Not only were these fruits of a singular color and transparencyâ€”some of them were yellow like topazes, others red like rubies, topped off by a strange perfume.

â€œWeâ€™re in Marmalade Forest,â€ said Nutcracker, â€œand the capital is just beyond that border.â€

And indeed, when Marie pushed away the final branches, she was stunned by the vastness, the magnificence, and the originality of the city that now loomed before them on a lawn of flowers. Not only were the walls and the belfries resplendent with the most vivid colors, but there was no chance of encountering the same shapes of the buildings anywhere else on earth. As for the gates and the ramparts, they were constructed entirely of glacÃ© fruits, their true colors shining in the sun and dazzled more brilliant by the crystallized sugar that covered them. At the main gate, through which they entered the capital, silver soldiers presented their weapons, and a little manikin, enveloped in a gold brocade house coat, flung his arms around Nutcracker, saying:

â€œOh! Dear Prince, youâ€™ve come at last! Welcome to Marmaladeburg.â€

Marie was a bit astonished by the pompous title given Nutcracker. But she was then so distracted by the noise of a huge number of voices jabbering together that she asked Nutcracker if people were rioting or celebrating in the capital of the Kingdom of Dolls.

â€œNeither one, dear Mademoiselle Silberhaus,â€ replied Nutcracker. â€œYou see, the capital is a joyful, densely populated city that creates a hullabaloo on the surface of the earth. And this occurs every single day, as you will see. Just take the trouble to keep going forwardâ€”thatâ€™s all I ask of you!â€

Impelled by her own curiosity as well as Nutcrackerâ€™s cordial invitation, Marie quickened her steps. Soon she arrived at the marketplace, which had the

most magnificent vista in the world. All the surrounding houses were sugar candy, with galleries upon galleries. And at the center of the square, in the shape of an obelisk, there was a gigantic brioche, in the midst of which four fountains bubbled away: lemonade, orangeade, orgeat, and currant syrup. As for the basins, they were filled with whipped cream so appetizing that countless very elegant people, who appeared to be at the acme of fashion, were publicly eating the whipped cream with spoons. However, most agreeable and most entertaining at once were the charming little people strolling arm in arm, elbowing one another, laughing, singing, chatting at the top of their lungsâ€”all of which unleashed the merry tumult that Marie had heard. Aside from the inhabitants of the capital, there were men from every corner of the world: Armenians, Jews, Greeks, Tyroleans, officers, soldiers, preachers, Capuchin monks, shepherds, Punchinellosâ€”in short, all kinds of men, jugglers and tumblers, whom you encounter in the world.

Soon the tumult intensified at the entrance to a street leading to the square, and the merrymakers stepped aside, allowing the passage of a cortege. It was the Grand Mogul carried on a palanquin and escorted by ninety-three grandees of his kingdom and seven hundred slaves. But at that very moment, in a parallel street, the Grand Sultan came galloping along, accompanied by three hundred Janissaries. The two sovereigns had always been rivals, so to speak, and therefore enemies. As a result, the members of their suites rarely crossed paths without getting into a brawl.

The situation, as we can readily understand, was different when these two powerful monarchs met face to face. First of all, there was profound confusion, which the citizens tried to escape. Soon, the air was alive with shouts of fury and despair. A gardener, using the handle of a spade, had lopped off the head of a Brahman, who was highly esteemed in his caste. The Grand Sultan himself had knocked a terrified Punchinello off his mount, the victim tumbling between the legs of his quadruped. The brouhaha was getting worse and worseâ€”when they had a surprise encounter with the man in the brocade robe, the same man who had saluted Nutcracker as â€œPrinceâ€□ at the city gates. Now, in a single leap, the stranger reached the height of the gigantic brioche, where he rang the bell three times, a loud, clear, twinkling bell, and he cried out three times:

â€œConfectioner! Confectioner! Confectioner!â€□

Instantly the tumult faded. The two embroiled corteges disembroiled. Someone was brushing the Grand Sultan, who was covered with dust. Someone else was returning the Brahmanâ€™s head, recommending that he avoid sneezing for three days. Otherwise he might lose his head!

With calm restored, people were joyful again, and they each returned to sipping lemonade, orangeade, and currant syrup at the fountain and wolfing down big spoonfuls of whipped cream from the basins. â€œBut my dear Herr Drosselmayer,â€□ said Marie, â€œhow come that word, if you pronounce it three times, has such an effect on these little people? Confectioner! Confectioner! Confectioner!â€□

â€œI must tell you, FrÃ¤ulein,â€□ Nutcracker responded, â€œthat on the basis of their experiences, the people of Marmaladeburg believe in metempsychosis. They live under the influence of a prime cause known as â€˜Confectionerâ€™â€”a principle that, according to caprice, gives them the shape they desire. And they acquire that shape by being baked for a more or less prolonged time. Now since everyone feels that his shape is the best, no one ever cares to alter it. Thatâ€™s what gives the word â€˜Confectionerâ€™ its magical power over the inhabitants.

â€œAnd when the mayor pronounces that word, it is strong enough to put down the worst tumult, as you have just seen. At such a moment, each person forgets earthly mattersâ€”fractured ribs and bumps on the head. Then, entering his

home, he asks himself:

â€œâ€˜Oh, God! What is man and what canâ€™t he become?â€™â€□

While chatting, they arrived at a palace that, spreading a rosy light, was surmounted by a hundred elegant, aerial turrets. The walls showed scattered nosegays of violets, narcissi, tulips, and jasmine, and these various colors enhanced the rosy background against which it stood out. The enormous cupola at the center of the palace was strewn with thousands of gold and silver stars.

â€œOh, my goodness!â€□ Marie exclaimed. â€œWhat is this marvelous building?â€□

â€œIt is the Palace of the Marzipans,â€□ replied Nutcracker, â€œâ€”that is to say, one of the most remarkable monuments in the capital of the Kingdom of Dolls.â€□

However, absorbed as Marie was in her contemplative admiration, she nevertheless realized that the roof on one big tower was entirely gone, and that little gingerbread manikins on a cinnamon scaffold were trying to replace it. She wanted to ask Nutcracker about that disaster, but he cut her off:

â€œAlas! Not so long ago, this palace was threatened with a great deal of damage if not total dilapidation. The giant Sweet-Tooth had lightly bit into that tower, and he had even started nibbling on the cupola. But then the Marmaladeburgers brought a fourth of a town (named Nougat) and a huge portion of the Angelica Forest. Seeing these tributes, the giant agreed to withdraw, wreaking no further havoc than what you now see.â€□

At this point, they heard some sweet and charming music. The gates of the palace opened of their own accord, and twelve little pageboys emerged, clutching sheaves of aromatic herbs lit up like torches. Each head was composed of a pearl; six pageboys had bodies made of rubies, and six had bodies made of emeralds. And each page very nicely trotted along on two small feet of gold engraved meticulously in the style of Benvenuto Cellini.

They were followed by four ladies, who were the same size as Mademoiselle Claire, the new doll, but so splendidly clad, so richly adorned that Marie couldnâ€™t fail to perceive in them the crown princesses of Marmaladeburg. Upon spotting Nutcracker, the four ladies flung their arms around him with demonstrations of love, while exclaiming in one voice:

â€œOh! My prince! My excellent prince!â€¦Oh! My brother! My excellent brother!â€□

Nutcracker sounded deeply moved, as he dried the many tears that were gushing from his eyes. Taking Marieâ€™s hand, he said grandiloquently to the four princesses:

â€œMy dear sisters, may I introduce FrÃ¤ulein Marie Silberhaus, the daughter of Magistrate Silberhaus of Nuremberg, a gentleman who is highly esteemed in his native city. It was his daughter who saved my life, just as I had lost the battle. She flung her slipper at Mouse King, and later on she had the goodness to lend me the saber of a retired major. Had she not done those things, I would now be moldering in the grave or, even worse, be devoured by Mouse King.

â€œAh! Dear FrÃ¤ulein Silberhaus!â€□ cried Nutcracker, unable to master his excitement. â€œPirlipat, Princess Pirlipat, albeit the kingâ€™s daughter, is not worthy of untying the laces of your pretty little shoes!â€□

â€œOh, no! Quite certainly!â€□ the four princesses repeated in chorus.

And throwing their arms around Marie, they exclaimed: â€œOh! Noble liberator of our dearly beloved prince and brother! Oh! Excellent FrÃ¤ulein Silberhaus!â€□

And with these exclamations, which their joyously swollen hearts did not allow them to develop any further, the four princesses conducted Marie and Nutcracker into the palace. Here they urged the visitors to sit on charming little couches made of cedar and brazilwood and strewn with gold flowers. Saying they wanted to prepare the meal themselves, the princesses went in search of numerous small vessels and small bowls of the finest Japanese porcelain, spoons, knives, forks, saucepans, and other kitchenware in gold and silver. They brought the loveliest fruits and the tastiest candies that Marie had ever seen, and they made such a tremendous effort that Marie could tell that the princesses of Marmaladeburg were marvelous chefs. Now since Marie knew a thing or two about cooking, she tacitly wanted to take an active part in the proceedings. As if she could read Marieâ€™s mind, the most beautiful of Nutcrackerâ€™s four sisters handed the little girl a small gold mortar, saying:

â€œDear liberator of my brother, please crush some of that sugar candy for me.â€

Marie instantly did so, and while she was gently pounding away, making a delightful melody, Nutcracker started to describe all his adventures in detail. However, during his account, Marie was struck by something bizarre. Little by little, young Drosselmayerâ€™s words and the crushing of the mortar reached her ears only indistinctly. Soon she was virtually enveloped by a flimsy mist. Then the mist changed into a silvery gauze, which grew thicker and thicker around her as it gradually veiled the sight of Nutcracker and his sisters, the princesses. A strange singing, which reminded the little girl of the crooning she had heard on the river of attar of roses, mingled with the growing murmur of the water. Now it seemed to Marie that the waves were billowing underneath her, plunging and lifting her. She felt she was ascendingâ€”high, higher, far higher, and prrrrrrrrrrrr! And paff! And now she felt she was plunging down from a height that she couldnâ€™t measure.

Conclusion

You canâ€™t plummet thousands of feet without waking up. So Marie woke up, and upon waking up, she found herself in her little bed. It was broad daylight, and her mother was at her side, saying:

â€œIs it possible to be as lazy as you? Come on, letâ€™s get up! And letâ€™s get dressed very fastâ€”breakfast is waiting for us.â€

â€œOh, dear, sweet mother,â€ said Marie, wide-eyed with astonishment. â€œWhere did the young Herr Drosselmayer take me last night, and what admirable things did he show me?â€

Marie recounted everything that we have just described. And when she was done, her mother said to her:

â€œYouâ€™ve had a very long and charming dream, dear little Marie. But now that youâ€™re awake, youâ€™ve got to forget all that. Come and have breakfast.â€

But while dressing, Marie persisted in maintaining that it hadnâ€™t been a dream, that she had really seen all those things. Her mother then went to the cabinet, took Nutcracker (who was on the third shelf as usual), handed him to her daughter, and said:

â€œYou foolish child, how can you imagine that this doll, which is composed of wood and cloth, can have life, motion, and reflection?â€

â€œBut dear Mama,â€□ little Marie responded impatiently, â€œI know perfectly well that Nutcracker is no one else but the young Herr Drosselmayer, our godfatherâ€™s nephew.â€□

Marie heard a blast of mirth behind her.

The judge, Fritz, and Mademoiselle Trudchen were laughing their heads off at Marieâ€™s expense.

â€œAh!â€□ cried Marie. â€œArenâ€™t you also making fun of my Nutcracker, dear Papa? Yet he spoke very respectfully about you when we entered the Marzipan Palace and he introduced me to his sisters, the princesses.â€□

The hilarity grew so loud that Marie understood she had to provide some kind of evidence of what she had told them. Otherwise they would think she had lost her mind. Stepping into the adjacent room, she picked up a small casket in which she had carefully stored the seven crowns of Mouse King. Then she returned, saying:

â€œLook, dear Mama. Here are Mouse Kingâ€™s seven crowns, which Nutcracker gave me last night as a sign of his victory.â€□

The judge, quite amazed, scrutinized the crowns. Fashioned out of an unknown and brilliant metal, they were engraved with a finesse that human hands were incapable of implementing. The judge was unable to stop the examination, and he declared the crowns to be so precious that he ignored Fritzâ€™s appeals. Indeed, the boy stood on tiptoe to see them and he asked whether he could touch them. But his father refused to let him touch even one.

Her parents pressured Marie to tell them the origin of these tiny crowns, but she stuck to her account. Next, when her father, annoyed at what he regarded as her mulishness, called her a liar, the little girl burst into tears and cried out:

â€œAlas! Poor child that I amâ€”what do you want me to say?â€□

At that moment, the door opened. The godfather appeared and he exclaimed in his turn:

â€œWhatâ€™s the matter? What have they done to my godchild, making her cry and sob like this? Whatâ€™s wrong? Whatâ€™s the matter?â€□

The judge instructed the godfather about everything that had occurred. He then showed the godfather the crowns. But barely did he see them than he started guffawing:

â€œAh! Ah! Itâ€™s a great joke! Those are the crowns I wore on my watch chain several years ago. I gave them to my godchild on her second birthdayâ€”donâ€™t you remember, dear judge?â€□

The parents wracked their brains, but they couldnâ€™t ferret out a single reminiscence of that event. Still and all, they took the godfather at his word, so that their faces gradually regained their expressions of ordinary kindness. Seeing this, Marie dashed over to her godfather and exclaimed:

â€œBut you know all this, Godfather Drosselmayer. Admit that Nutcracker is your nephew and that heâ€™s the person who gave you these seven crowns!â€□

However, the godfather seemed to take the matter poorly. His brow furrowed and he scowled so deeply that the judge called little Marie over, taking her between his legs and saying:

â€œNow listen to me, my dear child! Iâ€™m speaking to you very seriously. Do me a favor and discard those wild fantasies once and for all! If you happen to say yet again that your ugly and misshapen Nutcracker is the nephew of our friend, Godfather Drosselmayer, I warn you that I will throw all your dolls out the windowâ€”not only Herr Nutcracker but all your other dolls, too, including Mademoiselle Claire.â€□

Poor Marie no longer dared to talk about all the beautiful fancies that filled her imagination. But my young readers, especially the girls, will understand the effect of spending just a single hour in as gorgeous a country as the Kingdom of Dolls, and viewing as succulent a city as Marmaladeburg. The traveler visiting these places will not easily forget them.

Marie therefore tried to speak to her brother about that whole business. But he had lost all his confidence in her the instant she had dared to tell him that his Hussars had taken flight. Convinced by their father that Marie had lied, Fritz restored the earlier ranks of his officers, and he permitted the trumpeters to play â€œThe March of the Hussars of the Guardâ€□ again. But this rehabilitation did not prevent Marie from believing what pleased her about their courage.

The little girl didnâ€™t dare talk about her own adventures. However, she was endlessly besieged by her memories of the Kingdom of Dolls. And when her mind dwelt on these memories, she reviewed everything as if she were still in Christmas Forest or in Rose Attar River or in the city of Marmaladeburg. Instead of playing with her toys as she had done before, she just sat there, silent and immobile, keeping her thoughts to herself. As a result, people called her the Little Dreamer.

But one day, with his glass periwig lying on the floor, his tongue darting into a corner of his mouth, the sleeves of his yellow jacket rolled up, Drosselmayer was repairing a clock. He had inserted a long, pointed instrument into its gears. Marie happened to be sitting by the glass cabinet, watching Nutcracker, as was her habit. She was so absorbed in her reveries that, suddenly forgetting that not only her godfather but also her mother were present, Marie accidentally cried out:

â€œAh! Dear Herr Drosselmayer! If you werenâ€™t made of wood, as my father claims, and if you really existed, I wouldnâ€™t imitate Princess Pirlipat, I wouldnâ€™t desert you. To oblige me, you wouldnâ€™t have to be a charming young man, for I truly love you. Ah!â€□

But no sooner had Marie heaved a sigh than the room was filled with such a racket that the little girl fainted and tumbled to the floor.

When she came to, she found herself in her motherâ€™s arms, and her mother said to her:

â€œHow is it possible, I ask you, that a big girl like yourself can be foolish enough to fall off her chairâ€”and at the very moment that Herr Drosselmayerâ€™s nephew has finished his travels and has returned to Nuremberg? Come on! Wipe your eyes and be good!â€□

Marie indeed wiped her eyes and, turning toward the door, which opened at that moment, she spotted her godfather. With his glass periwig on his head, his hat under his arm, his yellow frock coat on his torso, he was smiling with an air of satisfaction. Moreover, he was holding the hand of a young man, who was very tiny but very nicely shaped and very handsome.

The young man was wearing a superb red velvet frock coat with gold embroideries. He was also sporting white silk stockings and glossy patent-leather shoes. He had a delightful nosegay on his jabot and he was very daintily groomed and powdered, while a perfectly braided queue was hanging down his back. Furthermore, the little sword at his side looked studded with jewels, and the hat under his arm was woven of the finest silk.

The young manâ€™s amiable manners became known instantly. For no sooner had he entered than he deposited a huge number of magnificent toys at Marieâ€™s feet. More than anything else, he gave Marie the most delectable marzipans and the most delicious bonbons that she had ever tasted in all her life (aside from those she had enjoyed in the Kingdom of Dolls). Regarding Fritz: As if the godfatherâ€™s

nephew had guessed the boyâ€™s military pleasures, he brought him a saberâ€”the finest Damascus blade. Nor was that all. When, at the end of the meal, they reached dessert, the amicable Nutcracker cracked nuts for the entire company. Even the hardest nuts couldnâ€™t resist him for a second. His right hand placed the nut in the boyâ€™s teeth, his left hand drew the braid, and crack! The nut shattered into pieces.

Marie had reddened upon spotting that handsome little fellow, and she reddened even deeper when, after dinner, he invited her to join him in passing the glass cabinet.

â€œCome on, children, come on! And have a good time!â€□ said the godfather. â€œI donâ€™t need the salon. All the clocks of my friend the judge are working properly.â€□

The two young people stepped into the parlor. But scarcely was young Drosselmayer alone with Marie when he knelt down on one foot and spoke to her:

â€œOh, my excellent FrÃ¤ulein Silberhaus! You see at your feet the happy Drosselmayer whose life you saved in this same place. Furthermore, youâ€™ve been good enough to tell me that you wouldnâ€™t reject me like the ugly Princess Pirlipatâ€”if, to serve you, I had turned hideous. Now, the spell cast on me by Mouse Queen would lose its total impact on the day that, despite my ugly face, I were loved by a young and pretty girl. At that very moment, I would stop being a stupid Nutcracker, and I would revert to my original form, which is not disagreeable, as you can see. So, my dear FrÃ¤ulein, if you still feel the same way about me, please do me the honor of giving me your beloved hand, sharing my throne and my crown, and reigning with me over the Kingdom of Dolls, for I have now become its king again.â€□

Marie gently helped young Drosselmayer to stand up, and she said to him:

â€œYou are a good and friendly ruler, Your Majesty, and you have a charming kingdom adorned with magnificent palaces and inhabited by very cheerful subjects. I therefore accept you as my fiancÃ©, provided my parents have no objection.â€□

The salon door opened very softly. But the young people paid it no heed, they were too engrossed in their own feelings. Mother and Father and Godfather came forward, shouting â€œBravo!â€□ with all their strength. Marie was as red as a cherry, while the young man was unfazed. He went over to her parents, and with a graceful bow, he paid them a lovely compliment. He then asked for Marieâ€™s hand, and it was granted to him on the spot.

That same day, Marie was engaged to young Drosselmayer on condition that the wedding take place in a year.

One year later, the fiancÃ© came for his bride in a small mother-of-pearl carriage encrusted with gold and silver and drawn by ponies no larger than sheep. These creatures had an inestimable value, for there was nothing like them anywhere in the world. The bridegroom conducted his bride into Marzipan Palace, where they were married by the castle chaplain. Twenty-two thousand figurines, covered with pearls, diamonds, and dazzling jewels, danced at the celebration.

At this hour, Marie is still queen of the gorgeous kingdom, where we see brilliant Christmas Forests everywhere, rivers of orangeade, orgeat, and attar of roses, diaphanous palaces of sugar finer than snow and more transparent than ice. And finally, all kinds of magnificent and miraculous thingsâ€”provided your eyes are sharp enough to see them.

The End of the History of a Nutcracker